

Psalm 26

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[0 : 00] Well, it is one of the pleasant surprises of getting older that love increases.! The same is true for family.

So, John is my brother-in-law. I'm married to Susan, who's John's sister. And when we heard the news, of course, we just find our own hearts are, being in Canada, it's hard to be away.

And so, in God's kind and sweet providence, we at Grace Fellowship Church in Toronto had another preacher lined up for this Sunday. And so, I wrote John and said, hey, I can come if that would help.

And I can't believe he said yes. I mean, that guy, to get him out of a pulpit is something. So, it's just a great, great delight and an honor for me to be able to serve in this way, both you and your pastor, who we love very, very much.

I wonder if you would take your Bible and open to Psalm 26. I'm intending to do something a little bit dangerous, I think.

[1 : 25] What I'd like to do is, first of all, know when I should end. I forgot to ask anybody. When does this time end? That would also require me having a clock. Is there a clock? Thank you. Thank you.

You are such a good man. Thank you. Is your watch five minutes fast? Okay. Accurate. So, what I'd like to do is something a little bit dangerous from this perspective.

In the last couple of months, we've been through our own trial of a different form and a different kind. And I have found, like never before in my life, this desire to be rooted in the truth.

Because of the things surrounding the exterior of my life, I find myself continuing to go back to the Bible. And I was telling a family member last night, it reminds me of dad, Bob Heaney, in his latter days, and one of our last visits with him.

And, you know, we were talking about life and such. But then he pointed to the Bible beside his bed and said, you know, read this to me. I just want the word.

[2 : 38] And that always stuck out to me, that at his moments of greatest need and weakness, it was give me the word, give me truth.

And I'm not near in the kind of trial that he was in, nor that John and Joseph are experiencing. But I've found, as I'm sure you have too, that in the middle of our most difficult times, we are hungry for what is true.

We want to hold on to what is true. Because everything in life seems to be contradicting it, but we're going to hold on to what is true. Psalm 26 has been that for me for the last couple of months.

And I said, that's why it's a little bit dangerous, because when it's very personal, it's maybe dangerous that I'm going to read my own experiences into the psalm and try to make the psalm say what I want it to say. I don't think I'm doing that.

You can rebuke me if I am. But it also has advantages, I think, because this is very fresh to my life. It's very real to me. And these kinds of psalms have really opened up in my mind.

[3 : 43] So this psalm is one of those psalms that proceeds in kind of courtroom language. You don't see lawyers or judges here. But I think what you'll find is there's many psalms that do this.

There's kind of an opening plea, just like you stand before the judge and you make your plea, guilty, not guilty, or here's what I want from you, your honor. And then comes the evidence.

And then comes the closing arguments. And really that's how this psalm moves. It starts with the plea, and then he gives his evidence, and then his closing arguments.

I think right there there's a lesson for us when it comes to our prayers. God is not opposed to being reasoned with. Now he is opposed to you trying to paint him into a corner.

He is opposed to you grumbling and complaining. He is opposed to you trying to manipulate him. But he is not opposed to being reasoned with, especially when we are using his word, when we are claiming his promises and leveraging them against him.

[4 : 49] Didn't you say this? Well, then won't you do that? And there is a healthy way, I think, of approaching God. I think you see it all through the Bible. And we'll look at a couple of places where.

Well, maybe we won't, but if we have time, we will. But if you think Nehemiah chapter 9, when Nehemiah is praying on behalf of the people, he's just looking back at what God has already revealed in the Old Testament.

And he's arguing from that position of strength, from that position of truth. This is what you said you would do in the covenant. So now, Lord, won't you do it? If you think about the early church in Acts chapter 4, they're doing the same thing.

Oh, sovereign Lord, you're the one who oversaw the death and resurrection of our Savior Jesus. Now, won't you give us boldness like you said you would through Christ who promised that the Spirit would come and embolden our courageous witness.

Won't you give it? And the place was shook. God answered the prayer. So there seems to be this kind of fierce humility you can have with the Lord.

[5 : 55] It's not a high-handed pride and arrogance, give me what I want. But it's laying hold of the promises. It's laying hold of God through His promises.

It's making big requests from a big God. And I think that's how we ought to pray. So Psalm 26 gives us some lessons in that. It begins with the words of David.

You remember that those words are just as inspired as the rest. And that of David is telling you who the author is. Now, we know all kinds of things about David. What do you know about David?

Just give me three or four. He was a king. A what? Sorry? A warrior. A great singer. A great singer. Or sinner. Or both. A man after God's own heart. Isn't that interesting that the great singer-sinner is also a man after God's own heart?

[6 : 51] Yeah. He was a shepherd. He did kill a giant. It was a pretty big deal. One other part of his life that might have to do with this psalm.

If you think about an eight-year span of his lifetime was taken up with this one thing. Running away from who? Running away from Saul. So if you know David's life history, you know that he is anointed as king while Saul is king.

That news spreads. And Saul does what? Tries to kill him in his sleep. He launches conspiracies against him. He tries to get people to strike him down.

He puts a bounty on his head. He lies about him. And you have on two occasions in David's life, something happens between him and Saul.

While David is on the run, what happens? He spares his life. Once in the cave when Saul went in to relieve himself, right?

[7 : 56] And the other time when he's asleep out in the field. Both times he's chasing after David. Two times God sovereignly puts Saul in a very weak position where he can easily be slain.

And both times David chooses not to. He will not raise his hand against the Lord's anointed. It would be a sin for him to do that.

And I think this is worth thinking about. You are... People are lying about you. People are chasing you around the wilderness for no good reason.

They are making your life miserable. And if my chronology is right, I think that lasted between 8 to 10 years. Years, friends. Like a big chunk of your life.

Living in the middle of injustice. And on two occasions you could end it. You could just veer a little bit out of the realm of truth into the realm of sin.

[8 : 56] And you could end it. Seems like God is the one who brought him there. Maybe you're going to help God out a little bit. Just one little sin.

I'm just going to strike the Lord's anointed. And David refuses to do so. Even confesses his sin, cutting off the corner of his robe. The robe of Saul. What does he do instead?

What he does instead, I think, is Psalm 26. In the middle of false accusations, slander, his motives getting impugned, and attacks on his life. First of all, he makes the plea.

Verse 1. Vindicate me, O Lord. Are you NIV, right? Yeah, sorry. I didn't have time to change. So I'm going to be ESV. It'll be mostly the same.

But here's what he says. Vindicate me, O Lord. For I have walked in my integrity. I have trusted in the Lord. So this is Yahweh, the covenant name of God. I have trusted in Yahweh without wavering. [9 : 53] Prove me, O Yahweh. And try me. Test my heart and my mind. For your steadfast love is before my eyes. And I walk in your faithfulness.

I think this is a very, very bold request. This is David walking into the courtroom of Yahweh and saying, not guilty.

I plead not guilty. In fact, he says, Lord, you make your thorough investigation of me.

Prove me. Try me. Test me. My heart. My mind. My whole inner self. And you will see that I am not guilty. David is claiming that he has not wavered in his trust in the Lord.

The end of verse 1. I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. Now, I think that's true in the terms of the covenant under which he lived.

[10 : 58] What he's saying there is, look at Saul. Saul has abandoned the terms of the covenant. He is resorting to sinful measures to try and keep his power.

But I'm not playing that game. I'm not doing that. I am trusting in you without wavering. In other words, David says, no matter what happens in my life, the pattern, the flow of my life, is that I am not wavering in my trust in you.

I'm always coming back to you. Even when I cut off the corner of his robe, I'm repenting of that and I'm coming back to you. And I think right there, we ought to stop and say, well, what about me?

Can I say I am not wavering in my trust in the Lord? What about you when someone slanders you? When they speak evil about you, when they make up lies about you? Can you say, I'm not responding in kind? I'm looking to the Lord.

[12 : 07] Looking to the Lord. I have walked in my integrity. That's what David is making as his plea.

But then look at the evidence that he gives. Kind of two parts. Two. Exhibit A and exhibit B. Exhibit A is this. I have no past association with evil.

This is verses 4 and 5. This is his evidence to prove his claim that he is innocent in the eyes of God and that God ought to vindicate him, ought to declare him to be an innocent man. That's what he means by vindicate me.

Prove it. Show what I really am. You know what I am. You show it. Here's the evidence. Verse 4. I do not sit with men of falsehood, with liars, nor do I consort with hypocrites.

I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked. Liars, hypocrites, evildoers, and the wicked.

[13 : 12] Those are descriptors of people who do not take God seriously. That's what the root of hypocrisy is, right?

It's acting like what God has said is not actually true, trying to appear one way before some people, and then live consistent to what you really believe over here.

David says, You will not find me consorting with. I'm not like these people. I'm not sitting with them. I'm not consorting with them. I'm not in their assembly.

I'm not hanging out with these kinds of people. It's not just that he's not around them, right? Our Lord said that... I remember when...

Well, the Lord said, Be in the world, but not... What? Of the world, right? So we still have to be around sinful people, and that's a good thing, because if we're not around them, we can't tell them about the sinless ones.

[14 : 10] So we're glad to be around, but what David's saying here is, I'm not part and parcel with their ways. I'm not playing on their level. I'm not politicking and getting into all this intrigue like Saul is doing and his kind of people.

There's no history in my life of conspiracy and intrigue and backroom dealings and manipulation.

That's what people who do not trust in God, that's what they are famous for.

But you will not find, Lord, when you examine my life, when you test my life, you will not find that to be true of me. You look back on my life, and you're not going to see all that kind of stuff.

I'm an innocent man. That's what David is claiming. So no past association with evil. That's exhibit A. Exhibit B, no present association with evil.

Verse 6, I wash my hands in innocence and go around your altar, O Lord, proclaiming thanksgiving aloud and telling of all your wondrous deeds.

[15:14] Which I think is an absolutely wonderful image. Essentially, what David says is, when I finally get to the temple, where he can hardly ever get because of Saul, when I approach that altar, I make my sacrifice.

And these hands are clean. These hands are innocent. They are not full of lies and hypocrisy and evil doing. I can stand in the place. What is the temple, right?

God's meeting place with man under the old covenant. And so he can say, I can stand there in the meeting place, the place where you have told us to go, to be in front of you, and I can make my sacrifice, and I'm going to walk a big circle around the altar.

And as I walk around the altar, I'm going to praise your name, I'm going to tell of all the wonderful things you've done, and I'm going to thank you. I'm going to publicly thank you for all that you have done for me.

Only a man who's not a hypocrite can do that. Were you nervous about coming to church today? Trying to figure out how you're going to cover up some sin in your life?

[16:26] Probably every Christian at some point has done this. They're like, I hope that brother doesn't ask me about this particular area of my life. I hope that sister doesn't want to follow up with that thing I asked her to pray about. Maybe we just, we come with sort of this cloak around us, and we don't really want to be seen for who we are.

But here is David, this manly, strong soldier David, who says, I can stand before God with no shame and no hypocrisy. What better way is there to live?

I can't think of a better way than to be able to stand before God, with God's people, without hypocrisy, without shame. To stand in innocence.

If you think about it, innocence is a position of strength. You have nothing to hide. And therefore, nothing to fear.

So David says, yeah, I'm looking at my life, Lord. And I can approach you with this fierce humility to really leverage the promises that you have made to me as one of your covenant people.

[17:36] And again, this is not disrespectful. Puny prayers from a hypocritical heart are disrespectful. Big prayers from an innocent heart give God glory.

If you want to think about this, just look for a moment over to 1 Peter 3. This came to mind this morning as I was thinking about this psalm again as an example of this idea. 1 Peter 3 and verse 7. I forgot my readers, so I'm using my wife, so you can go ahead and laugh. That's the only way I'm going to see what I'm going to read. They look okay, Soph?

Okay, thanks. Look at what he says to husbands. Husbands, likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way. So according to knowledge, showing honor to the woman, 1 Peter 3, 7, as the weaker vessel since they are heirs with you of the grace of life.

And then look at this, so that your prayers may not be hindered. That is an amazing, an amazing thing.

[18:50] If you want God to hear your prayers, you better live with a kind of innocence before your spouse. That's what Peter is saying. If you are treating your wife incorrectly, if you are not living with her according to knowledge, if you are not treating her as the weaker of the two weak vessels, if you are not studying her like your encyclopedia, anybody read a whole encyclopedia?

Nobody even knows what an encyclopedia is. Okay, Wikipedia. Has anyone read Wikipedia? Wikipedia? See, I remember when I was a kid, there would be these, you know, the Encyclopedia Britannica, right?

We had a set, and I would take a thing down, and it was amazing. You could just read stuff, but I never read the whole encyclopedia. It's like the Lord says, when you get married as a husband, your wife is now your encyclopedia.

And here's the fascinating thing. Did you ever notice that the Encyclopedia Britannica guy always came around every three or four years? We have an updated version now. And the same thing is true in marriage.

Just when you think you've read the encyclopedia, there's an updated version. And so here, this is a constant thing for husbands. I'm getting off track.

[20:00] All he's saying here, right, is there is a link between God hearing your prayer and how you're living. If you're living with a kind of hypocrisy as a husband, don't expect God to hear your prayers.

It's an active word, he says there. He will break up your prayers. He will hinder them. God will create interference. So everything's digital now, but remember your radio when you got out of, you're trying to listen to the ball game, and static, right?

God is putting static in your prayers if you're not living with your wife in this way. And so here's another example of, I think, what the Lord is saying here is you've got to live before him with this kind of innocence, this kind of integrity.

So David makes his case, and then he brings his closing argument. Let's go back to Psalm 26. What is a lawyer trying to do with a closing argument?

You tell me. Sum it up and make the case. Right? My last opportunity of persuasion.

[21 : 15] So I've entered my plea. I'm innocent here. You've got to vindicate me. You've got to prove my innocence. I'm not going to do that. Here's my exhibit A.

Look at my life. Here's my exhibit B. Look at my life. Now comes my closing argument. Verse 8. Oh Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells.

Pause there for a moment. Interesting that he says this because he can rarely get there. Right? It's the one place he can't go. Saul's got him on the run.

He can't go to Jerusalem. Oh Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells. Do not sweep my soul away with sinners nor my life with bloodthirsty men in whose hands are evil devices and whose right hands are full of bribes.

I think his closing argument is a statement of allegiance. I'm aligned with you, Yahweh.

[22 : 24] I'm tight with you. I love your house. I can't get there. There's an unjust dude that's keeping me from getting to the one place I want to go.

But you know my heart. You know I love that place because that's where you are. That's where you make yourself known to your covenant people. And so what does David do? He leans into these covenant promises that God has made.

He says, I'm yours. I'm not with these kind of evil men. These are real threats that David is living with, right? People are trying to kill him.

I don't think many of us have lived with that threat. There's a bounty on his head. And he's saying to God, God, you draw a distinction here.

Keep your promises to the one who is faithful to you. I'm being faithful to you. Keep your promises to me. Now you can probably relate to that.

[23 : 27] Lord, my allegiance is with you. Keep your promises. Keep your promises. Because truth be told, when I'm looking around right now, it doesn't look good.

I don't know why all these things are happening. I don't know why all this outside attack. I don't understand why motives are being assigned to me that aren't mine.

I don't understand why slander is coming toward me. I don't understand. I'm just trying to live my life. I'm just trying to live my life before you. You're the one I want. Will I veer off the path, enter into their ways, get involved in their conspiracies, be involved in their slanderous while I return in kind? You say that about me, I'm going to say that about you. Even in your own marriage. And then David ends with this final resolve.

Verses 11 and 12. I break this off from the closing argument because in the image I have of sort of this courtroom thing, I feel like I can picture David and he's pacing at the front and he makes his case and he gives his closing argument and as he's walking out of the courtroom, he says, and here's something else.

[24 : 45] Because it's like in the end of this psalm, he's saying, it's almost like I don't care how you're going to rule in this matter. This will not change. Verse 11. But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity, redeem me, and be gracious to me.

My foot stands on level ground. In the great assembly, I will bless the Lord. These are words of confidence.

This is David saying, look, regardless of what happens to me, maybe Saul's going to get me and maybe I'm going to die in my sleep with a spear through my heart.

I don't know. But Lord, in the midst of all these allegations and conspiracies and slander and lies, here's the deal.

as for me, I shall walk in my integrity, redeem me, and be gracious to me. Can you claim your integrity before God?

[25 : 53] So, today, if trials came fast and furious toward you, could you go to God and say the words of this song?

Lord, I stand in my integrity. As for me, I will walk in my integrity, redeem me, be gracious, vindicate me because I am innocent. I have wavered. See, I don't mean this in a perfect, flawless way, but I think in that New Testament way we can speak of living above reproach.

You know, one of the qualifications for an elder is his life must be above reproach. That doesn't mean sinless. Otherwise, we would need to worship him. It just means that in the warp and woof of life, there is sanctification.

Not perfection, but sanctification. And it seems to me that all of us ought to be pursuing this life that kind of bleeds integrity.

He's the same no matter where he is. She is consistent. She is consistently a Christian at church. She is consistently a Christian in her home. She is consistently a Christian in her workplace.

[27 : 08] She lives by the value system of God. And then there is this sense, I believe, where we can go to the Lord in the words of this psalm when trials come and say, Vindicate me, O Lord.

However, as good as our lives get, they are never perfect, are they? And we do waver. We've wavered, we've wandered, we've wilted, and we've waned.

We have, like, a hundred times in the last week, we've shied away from the promises, we've forgotten the commands, we've gone our own way, troubles have come, and we've said, that's enough, I can't trust God anymore, I'll take care of it with my own hands.

And that's why we say, praise be to God, that He sent His beloved Son into the world, that Son who, in every respect, was tempted as we are, and yet never sinned.

And because of that, because that's who He is, He can, He can pray this psalm with the greatest, the greatest meaning, I guess is the way to say it.

[28 : 22] He took our sin on His shoulders, and He can stand in innocence before the Father as He's suffering in our place, and He can say, vindicate me, O Lord.

For I have walked in my integrity, I have trusted in Yahweh without wavering. If anybody can say that, Jesus can say that. And so our greatest need, my greatest need, our greatest hope, is not our integrity, it's not our faithfulness, it's not our spiritual consistency, as important as all of those things are.

Rather, our greatest hope is the integrity, and the faithfulness, and the spiritual consistency of Christ, our substitute. Because He's our substitute, what a pleasing thought that we can take the words of Psalm 26 and through Christ pray them with great, great confidence.

When all the accusations and the trials come, we can say, verse 11, as for me, I shall walk in my integrity, redeem me, and be gracious to me.

My foot stands on level ground. In the great assembly, I will bless the Lord. A few weeks ago, I was in a courtroom in Toronto, Superior Court downtown, and I was listening to trumped up accusations, lies, falsehoods, mostly directed at me.

[30 : 01] And I don't like courts. I think they're scary. And I had Psalm 26 open on my phone, and I got to verse 11, and it was almost like I had to stop crying.

The Lord just so graciously brought to mind, my foot stands on level ground. Not because of me. Because of Christ.

I know that I had been honest with God, that I had made my requests, and I had told Him I was going to stand in my resolve. And I could know that regardless of the outcome of whatever this court was going to decide, God Almighty shall vindicate me, if not in this day, then in the great day. And not because of who I am. Not because of my integrity. Not because of my consistency. But because of when He looks at me, He sees the righteousness of Christ. It is amazing to me how many times the words just, justice, judge appear in the revelation.

And it strikes me that in the great day, you and I, with all the angels, are going to stand around the throne, and one of the key themes that we will be praising God about is justice.

[31 : 23] Justice has finally been done. What do the martyrs saying? Under the altar or under the throne? I can't remember which. Anybody remember? Someplace close to God in the revelation. And there they are and they're crying out, when will justice be done?

Not yet, He says. But the day is coming. And so you and I can stand in the middle of all these trials, all the slander, all the accusation, all the difficulties, and like our Lord, just say, vindicate me.

And as for me, my feet stand on solid ground. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.
Praise the Lord.