



How does God grow us and mature our faith? There are many ways he does that. We often think that it looks linear. There may be a few bumps in the road, a plateau or two, but overall the arrow continues to climb, much like the stock market. I've learned from experience and from the Psalms that spiritual growth looks more like this. Isn't that your experience too?

Walter Brueggemann, a professor of Old Testament, organizes the Psalms in three categories—Psalms of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation. It's true, there are definite seasons of life. For some of you this morning, you sense God's blessing in your life. You are living a thankful and grateful life. Psalms of orientation speak your language, "Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" For others, you are in a season of hurt, suffering, pain and death. Sometimes you find yourself bubbling up with anger, resentment and even self-pity. Psalms of disorientation describe exactly how you are feeling, "My soul is in deep anguish. How long, Lord, how long?" And then one day God surprises you and lifts the burden you've been under. Joy breaks through the pain. Darkness turns into light. These are the Psalms of new orientation, "You've turned my wailing into dancing...you clothed me with joy." Where are you at this morning? Are you in a season of orientation, disorientation or new orientation? Maybe some of you are heading out of one season and into another.

The Bible teaches we primarily grow through those tough seasons of disorientation. It's hard for us to swallow because our culture is committed to a linear success model and to the avoidance of pain, hurt, and loss whatever the cost. If you find yourself in a season of disorientation people begin to wonder what you have done to deserve it. This morning we are going to study Psalm 7 which is a Psalm of disorientation. It's a lament Psalm. In it we find David crying out to God, begging him to act justly because David's enemies are spreading vicious lies and false accusations. David is devastated by this slander.

The problem David faces is stemming from a man named Cush the Benjamite (you see his name at the heading of Psalm 7). Cush is spreading untrue and unjust accusations against him. We don't know much about Cush, but in my native tongue of Hayward, he is a hater, and haters gonna hate! Cush is from the same tribe as King Saul. He didn't like the fact that David is now king in place of his man Saul. Cush begins to slander David's good name.

Have you ever been a victim of a false accusation or slander? Have you ever been deeply wounded by unjust criticism? I'm not talking about gossip or even accurate criticism; those are different; those can be dealt with. Slander are false and malicious statements that can damage your reputation. The real problem with slander is you can't address the issues they've raised against you. You can't apologize or repent of something you haven't done. The more you defend yourself, the more guilty you look. Often times the problem of a false accusation is it can stick in your heart, sink in and do all kinds of damage. Maybe some of you are there this morning. Maybe you are dealing with a false accusation and it's tearing your soul apart. You are in a season of disorientation and you can't see the way out. If you've never been a victim of a false accusation, then take good notes; it will happen. Thankfully, David tells us five things we should do when we are accused falsely.

### **Find Refuge in God**

**LORD my God, I take refuge in you;  
save and deliver me from all who pursue me,  
or they will tear me apart like a lion  
and rip me to pieces with no one to rescue me  
(verses 1–2).**

The first thing David does is find refuge in God. He calls upon the strong name of God, "*Lord (Yahweh) my God (Elohim).*" He runs to God in prayer, places himself and the false accusations in the mighty hands of God. David begins by addressing God personally, "my God," and reminds himself of the protection only God can give. It is in God that David finds security, protection, and affirmation. You may wonder what the big deal is all about. Why can't David just shake off these false accusations and move on? He's the great king! But slander was a serious matter for someone in David's position. The king of Israel was the Supreme Court and the Commander in Chief. An accusation like this attacked his integrity and threatened to erode the moral basis of his kingdom. David knows this and that is why he compares these attacks to lions tearing his soul apart.

David understood, and we should take careful note of this too, in times like this, there is only one thing to do—take your problem to God. It's sad to admit, but the Lord is often the last person I bring my problems to. I'll run to my wife and complain. I'll vent to some good friends. I'll ask people to pray for me. None of those things are wrong, but our first reaction should be immediately

going to the Lord in prayer. It's opening up his Word and saying, speak to me God. That's what a mature man and woman of faith does. They lay themselves before God and hold nothing back. Men, we are terrible at this. We never go to the doctor, never take medicine, never ask for directions, and never cry (unless it's allergies of course). When we suffer, we suffer alone and won't even admit it. David shows us a new way. David recognizes he needs a shelter, a refuge. He runs to God long before the problem gets worse. Finding refuge in God is not a last resort for David. Don't wait until you're deeply in trouble. Admit your need for God and take refuge in him now.

### **Invite God to Evaluate Your Actions**

**LORD my God, if I have done this  
and there is guilt on my hands—  
if I have repaid my ally with evil  
or without cause have robbed my foe—  
then let my enemy pursue and overtake me;  
let him trample my life to the ground and make  
me sleep in the dust (verses 3–5).**

Not only does David find refuge in God, he then invites God to evaluate his actions. David lays his heart on God's operating table and asks him to closely examine it. This is one of the hardest things to do. But David knows and later writes in verse 9 God "*probes minds and hearts.*" David has examined his own heart as best as he could. He knows he is not perfect, but his conscience is clear. Whatever the accusation was, David is convinced it's not true. He's so convinced he invites God to evaluate his actions and look deep within his soul. If David is found guilty by God, then he is willing to suffer the consequences of his actions.

I don't know about you, but that's a scary thing to do! If we truly examine our heart and motives, I am sure we will find areas where we haven't done right. In many ways we are all guilty. But David understands that God is the only one who knows the heart and can examine our motives. His conscience is clear, he's searched his heart, and he knows he is not guilty of the false accusations. So David begins by showing us when slandered we can find refuge in God. He asks the Lord to evaluate his heart.

### **Ask God to Act**

**Arise, LORD, in your anger;  
rise up against the rage of my enemies.  
Awake, my God; decree justice.  
Let the assembled peoples gather around you,  
while you sit enthroned over them on high.  
Let the LORD judge the peoples.  
Vindicate me, LORD, according to my  
righteousness,  
according to my integrity, O Most High.**

**Bring to an end the violence of the wicked  
and make the righteous secure—  
you, the righteous God  
who probes minds and hearts (verses 6–9).**

Think about what David is doing here. Does this bother anyone? He is asking God to unleash his fury upon David's enemies. You might say, "Well, that doesn't sound very Christian. Why can't David be more forgiving? Isn't God full of love and compassion?" It doesn't seem to make sense to ask God to rise up in anger and judge people who have wronged us.

Let's consider this for a minute. People say, "How can a good and loving God be filled with wrath and judgement?" I think we can all agree there are things we should get angry about. There are situations where we want to see justice prevail. I think about Ariel Castro, the Ohio man convicted of imprisoning three women in his house and raping them repeatedly for a decade. People were rightly outraged over this tragedy and expected justice to be served. Castro was sentenced to life in prison plus 1,000 years. Do you think the three victims had a right to be angry? Do you think it was right for people to expect justice in this case?

The same goes with God. When injustice is taking place, God does not sit by and do nothing. It's entirely appropriate for God to take notice of the wrong and act, and that's exactly what David is asking God to do. P.C. Craigie says, "whereas (a false accusation) may deceive and convince our fellow human beings, it cannot deceive God." David is asking God to judge them according to his righteousness and justice. Believe it or not, we can actually find hope in God's anger and wrath. Like David, when we are beat down and pursued by people who are out to get us and you can't do anything about it, we know that God sees and God will set things right.

N.T. Wright, one of my favorite theologians, puts it this way: "The word judgment carries negative overtones for a good many people in our liberal and post-liberal world. We need to remind ourselves that throughout the Bible God's coming judgment is a good thing, something to be celebrated, longed for, yearned over. It causes people to shout for joy and the trees of the field to clap their hands. In a world of systematic injustice, bullying, violence, arrogance, and oppression, the thought that there might come a day when the wicked are firmly put in their place and the poor and weak are given their due is the best news there can be. Faced with a world in rebellion, a world full of exploitation and wickedness, a good God must be a God of judgment."

David teaches us that it is entirely appropriate to ask God to act and set things straight. It doesn't always happen in this life, but justice will prevail in the next. We can go to God in prayer and ask him to act. We can lay our problem out before the Lord and say, "Do you see this? Please do something!" On the basis of David's righteousness and integrity, he was able to do so without

fear. But, like David, we have to be willing to examine ourselves and allow God to work in our hearts as well. Ben Patterson writes, "When you ask God to set things straight around you, be willing to have yourself set straight too." In this Psalm David is not guilty, but read Psalm 51 and you see a broken man pleading with God begging for mercy because of his sin.

### **Remind Yourself of Who God is**

**My shield is God Most High,**

**who saves the upright in heart.**

**God is a righteous judge,**

**a God who displays his wrath every day.**

**If he does not relent,**

**he will sharpen his sword;**

**he will bend and string his bow.**

**He has prepared his deadly weapons;**

**he makes ready his flaming arrows.**

**Whoever is pregnant with evil**

**conceives trouble and gives birth to  
disillusionment.**

**Whoever digs a hole and scoops it out**

**falls into the pit they have made.**

**The trouble they cause recoils on them;**

**their violence comes down on their own heads  
(verses 10–16).**

An interesting change happens in verses 10–16. In verses 1–8 David is primarily talking to God and pouring out his heart directly to God. But, in the rest of the Psalm David begins to talk **about** God, not **to** God. Specifically, he reminds himself and God of who God is. Prayer is often talking to God about God. David, like us, needed to remind himself of the character and nature of God. It's as if David takes a step back from his awful situation to get a bigger picture of who God is. His perspective has changed.

David reminds himself that God will protect and save him as a shield against his enemies. God is a righteous judge who will judge his enemies if they do not repent. David's conviction that God will judge evil grows as he describes the Lord as a warrior who sharpens his sword and prepares his bow with flaming arrows. God, David writes, has also arranged evil in such a way that it eventually brings judgement on itself. David uses three images to describe the folly of evil. He says it's like a pregnant lady who gives birth to disillusionment or lies. Evil is also like a hunter who sets a trap only to fall into the pit themselves. And finally, evil is like a boomerang that's maliciously thrown to hit someone only to return and smack them on their own head! I'm reminded of Haman, the evil prime minister of Xerxes I, in the book of Esther. When Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman, Haman plotted to destroy Mordecai, his family, and all the Jews in the Persian

Empire. But Esther intervened and saved her people. Haman was hanged on the very gallows he had constructed for Mordecai. God is always in control of events, even when wickedness and evil seem to be winning out.

As David goes to God in prayer, he finds refuge in him, he examines his own actions, he asks the Lord to act justly, and then reminds himself of who God is. In all this David's perspective changes. Slanderers who once felt like lions out to devour him are now looking like helpless victims of God's justice. Those who falsely accuse David won't be victorious. In the end, they'll suffer God's judgement or they'll do themselves in.

### **Praise Him**

**I will give thanks to the LORD because of his  
righteousness;**

**I will sing the praises of the name of the LORD  
Most High (v. 17).**

Once you've seen God for who he really is, your God-given response is to praise him. David starts the Psalm in crisis and ends it in praise. David is not an academic who knows stuff about God. He has a real and authentic relationship with God. David celebrates and thanks God for his righteousness. David then bursts out with singing to the God who really sees David and knows he is not guilty of this awful false accusation. The wounded man is now a singing, strong and victorious man.

What's interesting about all this is David is worshipping God even while, as far as we know, his enemies have not been brought to justice. We don't really know if David was ever vindicated in his life of the false charges. What an amazing testimony that is for us. Sometimes problems never really go away. But, we can change and deal with them differently by God's grace. Even in the midst of David's pain, he could experience a breakthrough. David came to God with a huge problem. He found refuge in God. He asked God to evaluate his heart. He begged God to act. And he reminded himself of who God is. That is how to handle a false accusation.

I can really relate to David. Well over a year ago a person shared with me an email from another person. This email said that a friend of a friend was accusing me of something terrible and untrue. So, an anonymous person told an anonymous person, who told another person who then told another person who then told me about the accusation. I was shocked! I was confused! I immediately talked to Mark about the false accusation. We talked with the elders. I of course talked with my wife. We tried to get to the bottom of it and find out who was making this accusation, but they all wanted to remain anonymous. I was devastated. I couldn't believe that someone was falsely and anonymously accusing me of something I did not do. As a pastor and an elder, I felt that my integrity and my ministry was being

attacked. Like David there was really nothing I could do about it and that was really hard.

My wife, our elders, and my close friends encouraged me to forget about it and move on. To be honest, it was easier said than done. The Enemy loves to fire arrows like this our way and this one was much harder to remove from my armor. My joy was totally robbed as I mulled over my past wondering who this person could be and why they were saying these things. I prayed. I read my Bible. I memorized Scripture. I examined my heart. But, it was a struggle for me to move forward. Like David I was distraught. Then one day, I sensed the Lord just lift the burden off my shoulders in the way only God can do. Like David, I was able to worship him and thank him for his mercy and grace. But, it was a long process.

I don't know what you are going through. But I encourage you to take the steps David showed us in this Psalm. Bring your problem to God. Find refuge in him. Ask him to search your heart. Ask

God to act. Remind yourself of who God is. Then praise him and worship him with your whole heart.

As we continue to worship God, let's remind ourselves of Jesus. Jesus was falsely accused and slandered by men. Jesus would pay the ultimate price for those accusations by being brutally tortured and murdered on a cross. Even though he was not guilty, he would take upon himself the guilt and sin of all humanity. Dying in our place and for our sin, Jesus satisfied the wrath and judgement of God. Why? So that all who trust in Jesus and follow him will not experience God's wrath but enjoy his presence forever. In Jesus your past is forgiven, your present is given purpose, and your future is bright. Throw yourself at his feet today and worship him.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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