

## **WHEN YOU ARE TEMPTED TO RUN AWAY**

### **Psalms 11; 12**

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Psalm 11 and 12 are sort of short psalms. They sort of fit one another because both of them relate to feelings of despair that the psalmist has. Every time you plunk down in the psalms you can so identify with a part of God's Word which lets the emotions of the saints be clearly stated. There is so much to learn by praying in the psalms and by seeing what they teach regarding God.

#### **I. I've called Psalm 11 for title purposes "When You Are Tempted To Run Away."**

"In the LORD I take refuge. How then can you say to me: 'Flee like a bird to your mountain. For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart. When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?' The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them. The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates. On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot. For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face" (Psalm 11:1-7, NIV).

It's obvious when reading this psalm that David is in some kind of trouble. In the midst of that trouble someone is giving him advice: Flee like a bird to the mountain. The way to deal with your problems is make a sudden and rapid getaway. Isn't that the way we feel at times? Chuck it! We live in southern California where it is possible to have getaway weekends. There are vacations. I've yet to read anything that gives you a permanent getaway if you don't have money. Even a short getaway. We all need retreats to repair and restore. Jesus took retreats. But what is being envisioned here is not a weekend retreat or vacation but a permanent escape.

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Problems, when we're in them, always seem to be bigger than our resources to deal with them. Have you found that to be the case? When you get news that something's gone wrong with your health and you say, "How am I going to deal with that?" Or financially? Or emotionally? Or relationally? Things happen to us and the way they impact us immediately is, "What are we going to do now? I wish I could get out of this jam."

David is obviously feeling that. And maybe saying, "I can't take it any more. If one more thing happens to me." This psalm is still relevant three thousand years later. The continual freshness of the Bible never ought to cease to amaze us. How relevant to the human condition it is.

There are depths in the spiritual life, which David is in where he is called to go deeper than he's ever gone before. When we initially go deeper we don't think we can stand the pressure of the new depth. But as we get along in that depth we find new capacity. It's sort of like the deep sea diver that goes down and if he has the proper equipment keeps taking deeper depths but he must always make sure that you have the pressure on the inside that matches the pressure on the outside. The depths that we go are deeper and we grow. There are times we struggle and think we're not capable of any more. And it's true we're not capable of any more. But that doesn't mean that at some point in our life we won't be capable.

You watch the roller coaster of David's life and you'll find him plunging into deeper depths as his life goes along. God's requiring greater faith of him.

David is being advised to flee for two reasons. One is that he has been targeted by assassins whom he cannot see. "The wicked bend their bows. They set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows" (verse 2). That is a striking phrase "to shoot from the shadows." Here he's comparing himself to a bird flying in the open sunlight and the person shooting at him cannot be picked up. Hiding under the tree, hiding in the dark. To me this is descriptive of the

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feeling that we get sometimes in our life that things are flying at us from so many different directions you can't track where they're all coming from. They just pop up.

David is feeling that. He's not even sure where all his opposition is from. It's shooting from the shadows. That's one reason he's being advised to flee.

The second reason that motivates him to flee is the feeling of helplessness. There's absolutely nothing he can do. "When the foundations are being destroyed what can the righteous do?" (verse 3). A modern translation puts it well. He says in verse 1, "How can then you say to me 'flee like a bird?'" And that whole quotation continues till the end of verse 3 "When the foundations are being destroyed what can the righteous do?" If the same person who says, "Flee like a bird" is saying rhetorically, "When the foundations are being destroyed what can the righteous do?" it's obvious that the same person who's giving the advice to flee would answer that question: "There's absolutely nothing the righteous can do. That's why I'm telling you to get going. You cannot do anything. Your hands are tied. Get out. Go."

That's a bad thing when the foundations of our life are threatening ruin. This companion or friend or enemy or whatever of David is saying, "You can't do anything, so run. You're helpless." That's kind of where the enemy always wants us to be. To get us locked in to a resignation and a totally helpless syndrome. This raises then a second part. If this is the advice to David that he is getting then we ought to ask ourselves what does this psalm teach us about how David and how we handle the impulse to flee. To get out of our problems rather than staying with them and dealing with them.

There are several ways that David handled this. Two in particular I'll single out.

One is that David has predetermined his response. The psalm is a literary device. David has already thought through the problem when he writes the psalm. So his opening shot tells us that

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he has already predetermined how he's going to handle the advice. We know what the advice is by reading verses 2 and 3. But his predetermination is simply this. "In the LORD I take refuge. How then can you say to me..." (verse 1). He does not need to get away for he has already gotten to the Lord.

The longer I'm a Christian the more I realize being a Christian involves basic fundamentals. It's like any sporting contest. It's the team that executes the fundamentals that is the powerhouse year after year. A fundamental of the Christian life is habitual instinct of the soul to go to God in prayer with our life adversities. And to seek first of all to have refuge in the Lord, in the midst of that situation, rather than to seek first of all the common alternatives we use in like situations today—get on the telephone, grab a friend, try to get somebody else's advice, whatever. We all need companionship. I'm not downing that. But I wonder how many times we don't frantically reach out for someone else's counsel and input when our real need is to get peace about it which can only come by the strong hand of the Lord in our life. "In the LORD I will take refuge."

In the greatest struggle of life we go through, the instinct of Christians fundamentally is to reach God.

That's where David is in his life. That's why he has some great equilibrium as he goes through problems. All these kinds of things that are going on and where is he in crisis. We look at David's life and say, "He did so many things wrong." Yeah, he did. No trying to excuse him. But he did a lot of things right. One of the things he did most right is when he got in trouble, instinctively he went to God. "In you, O LORD, I take refuge" (verse 1).

What the righteous cannot do is flee. So David has determined not to get away for he has already gotten to the Lord. "My refuge is in God." He predetermined his response. There is pre-figurement and post-figurement. It seems to me that a lot of times in our life we need to look at

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something that happened to us in the past and re-see it. Something that's particularly a burr in us. Or has been a hurt in our life. One of the things we need to do is get forgiveness and cleansing over that and re-see it. There are times we need to refigure the past. Post-figure it. Look at it and say, "God's grace is sufficient. If there is any wrong that's been done I choose to forgive it. I choose to not nurse bitterness from the past. I choose to let it go." That's called re-figuring. Post-figuring.

Then there's pre-figuring which says in the event of catastrophe in my life I'm prepared with certain kinds of responses. I'm prepared to say that God has not somehow elected me that day to receive some bad blow. The only way that I think you can successfully pre-figure life is have this determination that Paul had in Romans 8. God is working good in all things. There are things that happen to us that are no good. On face value. But if I will let this circumstance be used in my life it will work out for good. God will work it for good. All bitterness and anger in my life is going to be destroying me. It's not going to hurt another person at all. It's just going to wind up messing me up.

David is predetermining his response. Same way Job did. "Though you slay me yet will I trust you" (Job 13:15). Same way the three Hebrew children prefigured their response: "God, O mighty king, is able and willing to deliver us from the fiery furnace. But if he does not we're not going to bow the knee anyway" (Daniel 3:17-18). Such an important quality of life to kind of make those advance decisions.

So David is able to handle the impulse to flee by having predetermined his response. Then the second way is he has an abiding faith in God. "The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them. The LORD examines the righteous. He loves justice" (Psalm 11:4-5, 7). Four things about God that come to David's

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mind that give him faith in God. One is the presence of God. He is in His holy temple. God is on the throne. Therefore ultimately all things will be all right. Which gives us the presence of God in His temple and the majesty of God on His throne. He not only sees God as someone to be worshipped but he sees God as someone who is really reigning on His throne. And he sees also that God has knowledge. God observes. God takes note of both the righteous and the wicked. And God will act justly. We need to know those things about God. And live our life not just knowing them but confident that God is indeed this way and will act in this manner.

The faith of David here is actually the spiritual predecessor of the saints in the Book of Revelation who have everything that can be thrown against Christians. Too many people read the Book of Revelation wrong. They're looking at it to find the idea of prophetic mystery and the key to prophetic interpretation. I guess that's ok in its place but the real drama of Revelation is that the devil is throwing everything against the saints and the saints aren't throwing in the towel. They have heard the language of the worship of heaven. And hearing they have said, "We'll choose to worship that way here on earth. And we'll choose to recognize that the God who reigns in heaven is the Lord omnipotent who reigneth in our heart and though the present circumstances may seem to lead to a different response yet our response of faith is "God is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silent before him" (Habakkuk 2:20). It's in that kind of response that they see victory.

When the devil cannot overthrow us outright he seeks to undermine us with stress to pick us off, to discourage us. It's at that moment when we need our faith in God.

So Psalm 11 ends where it begins, with the Lord. Verse one "in the LORD" and verse 7 "for the LORD." When we are in refuge in the Lord, that takes care of our fear. And when the Lord is righteous that takes care of our frustration. The foundations of the Lord are His nature and His

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will, what He is that He is righteous and what He does, that He loves justice. Therefore the upright, the psalmist says, will see His face.

I like where David ends up in this psalm. His real goal is communication with God. He doesn't ask for an immediate resolution of all his problems because he knows that God will ultimately take care of everything that's evil. In fact he uses language in verse 6 that's straight out of Sodom and Gomorrah as a prototype of the judgment God will bring upon all who act unjustly. But in the bottom analysis David says, "God, the thing I want to see most is not when you act in justice but just to see you. That'll be enough." The vision of God.

We wouldn't want to see His face if we didn't have love. David here looks forward to that day when he has an encounter with God face to face not from the standpoint of what merit he's piled up in heaven or what reward he's going to get. But rather he looks at it as, "If I can just be related to God, that's enough."

So here's a little psalm for those who are tempted to flee for help. Our refuge is in the Lord. And we'll resist the temptation to flee.

### **II. Psalm 12 is a cry for help in a godless age.**

Once again David is feeling down. Only this time the reason is not that he's being shot at by his enemies. Here the problem is the rampant nature of evil and he seems to be the only one that is letting his light shine for God. This psalm is also set to music.

**A.** The psalm is divided into four parts. The first part is a cry for help. This is what I call the Elijah complex of life. "I, O LORD, only I am left" (1 Kings 19:14). As the psalm develops it becomes clear that David has been worn down by the pervasive ungodliness of his age. I think in a modern setting Psalm 12 could be called the "Song of the Soaps." "The faithful have vanished from among men. Everyone lies to his neighbor; their flattering lips speak with deception"

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(Psalm 12:1,2, NIV). A literal translation of verse 2 would read “They speak vanity each man with his neighbor. With flattering lips and doubling heart they speak.” The talk is just fluff talk. It’s flattering talk and it’s from a double heart. The motives are mixed in the language. What is really striking here about what David is noting about the nature of his age is that speech has been adulterated to be propaganda rather than communication. The reason why God gave us speech is so we could communicate. We could talk to Him. We could talk to one another. Propaganda is when we take speech and use it in order to manipulate a person rather than to communicate to them.

I ask myself, “Do I use language to authentically communicate or do I use it to manipulate people to get something I want them to do? Do I use language in such a way as to make another person feel guilty?” I have motivated my kids at times by making them feel guilty. I think there are occasions that’s legitimate. Sometimes we in the ministry are guilty of using speech to manipulate people. We may do it with our kids, we may do it with our spouses, we may do it with people at work. That’s the problem David is noting here. That the speech is a dishonest kind of speech. And it comes from a double heart, not a heart that sincerely wanted to communicate. Only a heart that is wanting to manipulate.

This phrase “double heart” really struck me. In the Scripture there is various types of heart. It’s interesting that in the Early Church when the Spirit of God came upon the Early Church many people instead of having many hearts were all of one heart, one accord.

A cry for help. “God, does it really pay to serve you? Look at all those people out there that I work with.”

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Manipulation I think is where I exploit a weakness in another person to get them through my more clever use of speech to do what I want them to do whenever they honestly don't want to do it themselves and it's really, perhaps, not even appropriate to do it in the way that I'm asking. I believe we should do everything we can to not manipulate people by guilt because all that does is create resentment when we try to remind them how badly they've treated us. Or how much deserving we are of whatever that attention is. I try to stay away from that kind of preaching. I honestly believe Jesus gave people terms. They could follow Him but He didn't try to manipulate them. Like the rich young ruler. Jesus stated the terms and when the guy said no, He didn't try to put the squeeze on him. He just told him what the terms were. Because ministers are so results-oriented sometimes I think we'll cross a thin line with people and not let the Holy Spirit do the motivation but ourselves try to get in the motivational process. A lot of Christian service is done not because we love the Lord but because someone makes us feel guilty if we don't. Granted there are times we need to feel guilty. Guilt in the proper place can be right. But let's make sure we're motivating people rightly.

Paul persuaded men but he did it by stating clearly the gospel. He's said, "I have renounced the use of underhanded techniques and cunning. But with a straightforward conscious I appeal to all men" (Colossians 2). Especially when it comes to witnessing we want to state the message in such a way we just don't say, take it or leave it. There's no love involved in that.

**B.** Verses 3 and 4 are the second part of the psalm. It's a request for God to act. Here's where we get into this language of David where he's asking God to do something out of a fit of anger.

"May the LORD cut off all flattering lips" (verse 3, NIV). The Bible does not underestimate the power of the tongue. Look at the power of talk in the Garden of Eden where the serpent met with

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Eve. “If you do what I’m saying you’ll be as God” (Genesis 3:5). And in the Book of Revelation.

“The antichrist is given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies” (Revelation 13:5).

There’s tremendous propaganda pressure now all over the world.

C. The third part of this psalm is the Lord’s answer to this request that David has put out that God would act, that he would do something and cut off lips. Verse 5–6 the Lord directly says, “‘Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise,’ says the LORD. ‘I will protect them from those who malign them’” (verse 5, NIV). Verse 5 is only the second time so far in the psalms where God speaks directly. Notice the psalms most of the time involve our speaking to God. But sometimes in prayer we get the feeling very definitely that God is answering us. Sometimes too in a worship service someone will give a prophetic answer and say, “Thus says the Lord...” Perhaps it was when this psalm was first being formulated in David’s mind, perhaps it was in a group of people that were gathered for prayer that he is saying the first four verses. And perhaps one of the priests on that occasion might have answered what he was saying and his cry for help. “Thus says the LORD. I will now arise. I will protect those who are being maligned.”

This word directly from God in verse 5 is telling us that His judgments are always rooted in His moral nature. That when He acts in judgment it is not that He is capricious or has had a bad day. But because all of His judgments arise out of the greatness of His character. Unlike the words of the evil one who is maligning God’s people, “The words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times” (Psalm 12:6, NIV).

In the days of David that was the highest degree which you would refine silver. Seven times in the fire. Therefore the analogy is used of God’s Word. That God’s Word will stand the test. It’s stood the refining of persecution. It’s stood the refining of higher criticism. It’s stood the refining

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of skepticism. It's stood the refining of scientific discovery. It's stood the refining of personal experience. And through it all God's Word has been seen as that which is pure and strengthening the heart and the soul. The Lord's answer: "My words are flawless. I'm going to arise and I will address this problem."

We'll find that if we stay in one place long enough that God will help us to deal with it. And we'll get the strength of the Lord to get a resolution to the problem we're wrestling with.

**D.** That leads us to the fourth part of this psalm in verses 7 and 8. An assurance of trust.

There's first of all a cry for help, verses 1–2. A request for God to act, verses 3–4. The Lord's answer, verses 5–6, that we will find His words sufficient in our hearts to deal with the bad words we're hearing from others.

And the fourth part an assurance of trust. "O LORD, you will keep us safe and protect us from such people forever. The wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honored among men" (Psalm 12:7-8, NIV). Two assurances that David has. He has the assurance that when immorality is celebrated the wicked will freely strut. Everybody's going to parade around saying, "Isn't it wonderful to be immoral?" We're living in a different world than when I was growing up. Why is that so? Because when what is vile is honored among men the wicked freely strut about. David sees this as an age that is away from God. "The LORD will keep us safe and will protect his people forever" (Psalm 12:7).

When Pharaoh gave the edict in Egypt that any male child was going to be put to death Amram and Jochebed had three children. Terrible time to have a kid. No future. But this family had two boys and a girl. Miriam, Aaron, and Moses. Because they committed their way to the Lord and believed that God was greater than any age life was going on and they were going to commit the

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future to the Lord. It's one of the most marvelous statements in the world when Christian people believe in the power of God to bring their kids through. Sure the wicked will strut about freely. We're going to see more and more of that. History tends to be cyclical so unless the Lord returns we're going to see more pronounced evil until evil gets so bad that there is either a revulsion against it from within this country and there is a moral revival or we're conquered by someone who is outside of ourselves. That's always the way in history immorality has been dealt with. I hope it will be the first way and not the external occupation. But one way or the other these things have a way of purging themselves. Our American society has not yet sunk in morals to where the Roman society was. If things don't get reversed we're going to see a lot of things happening worse than they are now.

If we have trust in God, David says, God will keep us safe. This psalm is like all the others by the time David gets done praying his prayer—notice he almost always starts off depressed and winds up encouraged. You see that in Psalm 11. And Psalm 12. I think that's why prayer is so important in our life. We do get sandbagged and we need moments with the Scripture or with the Lord or with other believers when we can be encouraged.