

Praying for help (Psalm 13)

When life is overwhelming, the psalms offer a model for prayer.

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Psalm 13 is a prayer for times when life is overwhelming. It refers to an enemy, but sometimes the enemy is found not in the form of a person but in life circumstances beyond one's control. The psalm follows the recognizable pattern of prayers for help contained within the book of Psalms. It starts by stating the problem, moves to asking for intercession, and finishes with statements of confidence in and thanksgiving for God's actions to address the situation.

As I was struggling for a way to approach this psalm with a looming deadline, I experienced one of those occasions that motivated a desperate prayer for help. My life partner Paul was two weeks post-op following knee replacement surgery when he announced that he was going to take a shower. I bit my tongue and did not say out loud that I thought this was a bad idea. Instead, I insisted on being nearby. Thank goodness I did. Seconds after Paul stepped into the shower, his feet flew out from under him. He crashed to the floor, and his new knee split wide open. What looked like a crime scene unfolded. The paramedics came in an ambulance, and after a two-night stay in the hospital, reparative surgery followed.

Paul had been making excellent progress in physical therapy; he was well on the way to healing. Now we had to start the whole recovery process over.

So I modeled my prayer for help after the psalms: naming the problem ("How long, O Lord?"), asking for help ("Consider and answer me"), and ending with trust ("I will sing to the LORD because he has dealt bountifully with me"). My prayer sounded something like this: "Look what this enemy of life's circumstances has done! Please God, intervene in this situation. My nerves are shot, and I don't think we can handle another crisis. Please bring about healing of body and mind so that we can face this setback together. Thank you for access to excellent medical care and for a loving community of support. Forgive us when we take these for granted." The answer to my prayer came in the form of an amazing care team at the hospital, a shower chair sent by a cousin that arrived overnight, neighbors bringing meals, and members of our faith community who immediately reached out to help—small signs that the Lord has dealt bountifully with me.

The psalms provide us with words to pray when we're struggling to come up with our own, perhaps because we're overwhelmed by the situation we're facing. More importantly, they give us assurance that God is present, even when it doesn't seem like it. I feel encouraged to turn to the psalms for help the next time life circumstances appear as an enemy to fight.