

# PSALMS

(SONGS OF PRAISE)

TRUST  
IN THE  
LORD *and do good;*  
*dwell in the land and*  
*enjoy safe pasture.*

PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 24

*A prayer for grace, mercy, and protection against our enemies.*

1. To thee, O Lord, have I lifted up my soul.
2. In thee, O my God, I put my trust: let me not be ashamed.
3. Neither let my enemies laugh at me: for none of them that wait on thee shall be confounded.
4. Let all them be confounded that act unjust things without cause. Show, O Lord, thy ways to me, and teach me thy paths.
5. Direct me in their truth, and teach me; for thou art God my Savior; and on thee have I waited all the day long.
6. Remember, O Lord, thy bowels of compassion; and thy mercies that are from the beginning of the world.
7. The sins of my youth and my ignorance do not remember. According to thy mercy remember thou me: for thy goodness' sake, O Lord.
8. The Lord is sweet, and righteous: therefore he will give a law to sinners in the way.
9. He will guide the mild in judgment: he will teach the meek his ways.
10. All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth, to them that seek after his covenant and his testimonies.
11. For thy name's sake, O Lord, thou will pardon my sin: for it is great.
12. Who is the man that feareth the Lord? He hath appointed him a law in the way he hath chosen.
13. His soul shall dwell in good things: and his seed shall inherit the Land.
14. The Lord is a firmament to them that fear him: and his covenant shall be made manifest to them.
15. My eyes are ever toward the Lord: for he shall pluck my feet out of the snare.
16. Look thou upon me, and have mercy on me; for I am alone and poor.
17. The troubles of my heart are multiplied: deliver me from my necessities.
18. See my abjection and my labor; and forgive me all my sins.
19. Consider my enemies, for they are multiplied, and have hated me with an unjust hatred.
20. Keep thou my soul, and deliver me: I shall not be ashamed, for I have hoped in thee.
21. The innocent and the upright have adhered to me: because I have waited on thee.
22. Deliver Israel, O God, from all his tribulations.

## You are Psalms

Some people think you never get discouraged, but the fact is, when you do, you know where to run. Your prayers are open and honest because you realize that God already knows your heart, He's just waiting to hear you spill it. And when you do, what starts out as heavy ends up becoming a song of praise. You may struggle... and often you do... but each time, you grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness. You're just a song waiting to happen.

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*The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.*

## **PSALM NUMBER: 24**

### **EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM**

1. "To thee, O Lord, have I lifted up my soul." Having found no rest in creatures, but on the contrary, "briers and thorns" everywhere; disgusted with my former mode of life, and having torn my soul from the affections that tied it down to the earth, "I lifted it up" to thee. Through constant reflection, and love inspired by you, to you I began to cling, hoping for help from you in my temptations; and since "I put my trust in you, let me not be ashamed;" that is, I will not go from you in confusion, without having obtained the help I need, and thus be made "to blush" before my enemies.
2. "In thee, O my God, I put my trust: let me not be ashamed."
3. "Neither let my enemies laugh at me: for none of them that wait on thee shall be confounded:" An explanation of the words, "To blush before my enemies," in the preceding verse, for he should blush if his "enemies were to laugh at him" for having vainly trusted in God. By "my enemies," may be understood, both the wicked in this world, and the evil spirits, whose rejoicing and scoffing would produce intolerable confusion, were we seriously to reflect on it. He then gives a reason for his hope "of not being confounded," because "none of them that wait on thee shall be confounded;" that means, because we have learned by long experience, from the examples of our ancestors, and from your own promises, that those who put their trust in you, and patiently expect your help, were never disappointed in their "waiting on you." To "wait on the Lord" is a very common expression in the Scriptures, and means to expect him in the certain hope of assistance.
4. "Let all them be confounded that act unjust things without cause. Show, O Lord, thy ways to me, and teach me thy paths." This verse may be interpreted in two ways; first, to signify that those who sin without cause, meaning those who sin through malice, and not through infirmity or ignorance, "would be confounded." Such persons think neither of doing penance, nor of abandoning sin, and if they hope for anything from God, their hope is presumption. Another

21. “The innocent and the upright have adhered to me: because I have waited on thee.” Having said, in the preceding verse, that “I shall not be ashamed, for I have hoped in thee,” he gives a reason why he would fear to be ashamed at being deserted by God, and the reason is, that “many innocent and upright,” through the force of his example, especially from seeing him hope in God alone, “adhered to thee,” who certainly would cause him to blush and to be confounded were they to see him disappointed. “I shall not be ashamed,” then, has quite a different meaning in the end of the Psalm from what it had in the beginning of it. In the beginning the meaning was: “I will not be ashamed” before my enemies in their insolence; here it is, “I will not be ashamed” before my friends in their kind condolence.

22. “Deliver Israel, O God, from all his tribulations.” David, being not only one of God’s people, but also the prince and head of others, having prayed at sufficient length for himself, he now adds a prayer for his people; a general one, as being unable to enter into the peculiar wants and difficulties of each individual.

#### **END OF PSALM 24**

more literal meaning may be offered, viz., that both the visible and invisible enemies of the just would be confounded, for their persecutions of the just will be all in vain, because they will not accomplish the end they propose to themselves, the ruin of the just, and the bringing them to hell; whereas, on the contrary, such persecution becomes only an occasion to the just of exercising their virtue, and a source of everlasting merit. The Prophet then throws back the confusion on his enemies, saying, Lord, do not allow me to be confounded, as I will, if my enemies laugh at me, and exult in my ruin; but, on the contrary, let them be confounded, when they see they have been persecuting me, and provoking me to impatience, without effecting their object, and in vain.

“Show, O Lord, thy ways to me, and teach me thy paths.” By “thy ways,” we understand his law, which is really the way to God. “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments;” and the Prophet having asked the Lord’s help against temptations, explains what help he specially wishes for, and says, “Show, O Lord, thy ways to me,” make me tread in the way of your commandments —” and teach me thy paths;” that is, show me that most narrow road of thy most just law, for thus will I escape the mocking of all my enemies, and instead of being confounded, all they who, by their temptations, sought to harass me, will be confounded. He asks to be taught the paths of the Lord, not speculatively, but practically; that is to say, he asks for such grace as may move his will to observe the commandments cheerfully.

5. “Direct me in thy truth, and teach me; for thou art God my savior; and on thee have I waited all the day long.” A repetition of the foregoing, and a reason assigned for it. “Direct me in thy truth.” If left to myself, I will at once turn aside to the right or to the left, deserting the path of your commandments, on account of the prosperity or the adversity of this world: do you, therefore, take me by the hand, and direct me by the help of thy grace in the right path. “In thy truth;” namely, in thy law, which is the truest of all paths. “For all thy commands are truth,” Psalm 118 — “For thou art God my Savior;” of thee I ask this help, because you alone, being God can save my soul; for there is no other physician that understands the diseases of the soul; and, therefore, there is no one able to cure them but God alone, much less is there one able to restore them to perfect health; and I specially ask this favor, which I hope, too, to obtain, because “On thee have I waited all the day long;” that is, with perseverance and patience I have waited for thy medicine, and look for relief from nobody else. It is a source of great merit with God never to give up the hope of his help in temptations, or to look to human consolation.

6. "Remember, O Lord, thy bowels of compassion; and thy mercies that are from the beginning of the world." When God allows the soul to be harassed by temptation, or to wallow in sin, he seems to have forgotten his mercy; and thus the just man, after a long struggle with temptation, and seeing that however he may desire it he cannot guard against relapsing into sin, cries out to God to remember his former compassion and mercies. Between compassion and mercy there is this difference only, that the former seems to be the actual exercise of practice of mercy, the latter the habit of the virtue in the mind; and the same difference is observable in the Hebrew, though the words are much more dissimilar. The meaning then is: Remember, O Lord, that you were compassionate "from eternity," and not only compassionate, but in the habit of showing mercy, and the most paternal tenderness to thy children; and, therefore, mercy is thy distinguishing, as well as thy natural, tendency.

7. "The sins of my youth and my ignorance do not remember. According to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O Lord." He places forgetfulness in beautiful opposition to remembrance. Remember thy mercy, but forget my sins; for one is the cause of the other, for God then remembers his mercy when he does not wish to remember our sins any longer, but so remits and blots them out as if they were consigned to eternal oblivion. He remembers, however, the sins and ignorance of youth; that is, the sins committed through human infirmity and ignorance, because to those more than any others does his mercy lend itself, according to the apostle, 1 Tim. 1, "But I obtained the mercy of God, because I did it ignorantly;" and, perhaps, David had no other sins to account for; and this certainly is the prayer of a just man, who seems to have had to contend with such sins only; and with that, sins committed through malice are not forgiven through prayer alone, but need "Fruits worthy of penance." "According to thy mercy, remember thou me." He declares what he said in the words, "Remember thy bowels of compassion;" and forget my sins; for all this takes place when "God remembers the sinner according to his mercy."

8. "The Lord is sweet and righteous: therefore he will give a law to sinners in the way." He assures himself of the certainty of obtaining the object of his hope, by reason of God's goodness and justice; and thus, that he is wont to correct delinquents freely, because thereby he exercises his mercy towards man, and his justice towards sin; and the meaning is: "The Lord is sweet and righteous;" and, therefore, loves man, and hates sin; and, therefore, "gives a law;" that is, declares and points it out "to sinners in the way," to persuade them to abandon the old path, and, from being bad and wicked, to become good and just.

true child of God, for fear God may be displeased by the great number of them; and he, therefore, exclaims, "bear them." Do not be fatigued in carrying them, and supporting my weakness.

19. "Consider my enemies, for they are multiplied, and have hated me with an unjust hatred." He argues now from the number and the cruelty of his enemies. Lord, says he, you have seen "My abjection and my labor;" behold, now, the multitude, the cruelty, and the iniquity of my spiritual enemies. The enemies who seek to draw us to sin, and incessantly inflame our concupiscence with red hot weapons, are the demons whom St. Paul calls "The spirits of wickedness;" that they are innumerable is well known; and that they burn with the worst sort of hatred, with "An unjust hatred" against us, is equally well known. Hatred is said to be unjust, or most unjust, when one hates another without cause, without any provocation. The hatred may also be said to be unjust, when one seeks to harm another; not for any lucre or benefit, to be derived there from, but, from the mere spirit of mischief. Such is the hatred of the devil towards the human race, especially towards the elect; for mankind never did any harm to the devil, but he, blinded by envy, was the ruin of man. "By the envy of the devil, death came into the world," Wisd. 2. The same evil one now harasses the faithful by temptations, not for the purpose of deriving any benefit there from, but to gratify his delight in the ruin of the just.

20. "Keep thou my soul, and deliver me: I shall not be ashamed, for I have hoped in thee." Surrounded as I am by so many enemies, especially invisible ones, to resist whom I feel my own strength unequal, I have, therefore, recourse to you "to keep my soul," and by your care of it, to free and deliver me from them. For freeing and delivering from the enemy does not suppose that a capture has been made; it equally applies when a capture is prevented. "Thou hast delivered my soul out of the lower hell," Psalm 85, which means, as it does here, you have prevented my falling into it. The meaning may be also: Keep my soul in the prison of this body, in which I am detained a captive, "For the law of my members holds me a captive in the law of sin," and afterwards, in the fitting time, deliver me.

mercy on us.” “For he shall pluck thy feet out of the snare.” I have my eyes so intently fixed on God, because he will, as I trust, deliver me from all danger of temptations, which, like snares, beset us on all sides while here below. The expression may also mean, that I always keep up the intention of pleasing God, and of doing nothing opposed to his will. It may also mean the contemplation of the divine beauty, which is always before the mind’s eye of those that seriously love God; but, I consider the first explanation the most literal.

16. “Look thou upon me, and have mercy on me; for I am alone and poor.” As he is always looking to God, he justly asks to be looked upon by him. Such was his silent prayer when he had his “eyes ever toward the Lord,” hoping he may regard with mercy his loneliness and his poverty. He says he is “alone,” lonely and desolate, or (which is better) because he had in spirit detached himself from the whole world, and attached himself to God alone. He calls himself “poor,” because in his humility he looked upon himself as destitute of all virtues and merits.

17. “The troubles of my heart are multiplied; deliver me from my necessities.” I am more inclined to think the temptations of sin are referred to here, rather than temporal troubles. David was one of those who, with the apostle, Rom. 7, groaned and said, “But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death.” “The necessities,” from which he seeks to be delivered, seem to be those most troublesome motions of concupiscence, which, in spite of us, will sometimes torment us, and even lead us to sin.

18. “See my abjection and my labor; and forgive me all my sins.” He follows up the prayer, and asks forgiveness for the sins into which he may have fallen by the force of temptation. For, though a soul fearing God may be grievously afflicted, and take great pains in resisting concupiscence, still the just man falls seven times; and yet, from his fall, he may be proved to be just; because, at once, by his tears, his prayers, and his contrition, he quickly wipes away the filth and dirt into which he had incautiously fallen. By “abjection,” we are not to understand the virtue of humility; but his abjection, properly speaking, his meanness. For the just man, when he means to become quite perfect, looks down thoroughly on himself, and still does not escape sin. Instead of “Forgive me my sins,” the Hebrew has “bear my sins,” expressive of the trouble of the

9. “He will guide the mild in judgment: he will teach the meek his ways.” A qualification of the expression in the last verse “He will give a law to sinners;” which he says here does not apply to all sinners, but only to the mild and the meek, who do not resist God’s teachings, but rather covet instruction. “We will guide the mild in judgment;” that means, he will lead the humble and the mild through the straight path of his law, (for law and judgment appear to be synonymous, as we explained in Psalm 18,) which he then explains in other words, “He will teach the meek his ways,” that is, to the meek he will give the grace of knowing and loving, and thus fulfilling his law. Observe that the proud are not altogether excluded from the grace of God, but have their place assigned them. The proud, to be sure, are incapable of perfection, of which this Psalm principally treats, until, from the influence of fear, they do penance, and then, having shaken off the fear, become mild and humble. The grace of God, then, first softens and subdues the proud and the obstinate, and when thus humbled and contrite, “It guides them in judgment,” and “teaches them his ways.”

10. “All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth, to them that seek after his covenant and his testimonies.” Having stated that not only were the meek guided by God, but that all God’s dealings with such souls were acts of mercy and justice, justice meaning the honor and truth that oblige men to perform their promises. “The ways of the Lord,” mean here his works, they being, in some respect, the “way” in which he comes to us; unless we prefer to understand the expression as meaning the Lord’s rules or customs, and, as it were, the law he uses. Thus, the “Ways of the Lord;” the law he gives us, by means of which, as by a straight road, we ascend direct to God, is sometimes intended by the expression; at other times, it signifies the law he uses himself, when, through his works, he descends to us. And as David had previously spoken at great length on the former, he now speaks of the latter, that is, of the law he made for himself, and which he observes towards us; and he, therefore, lays down, “All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth;” that is, his law, his custom, his mode of dealing with us, are all in mercy and truth; so that whatever he promises in his mercy, he invariably carries out in his truth. Who doth God so deal with? “With those that seek after his covenant and his testimonies.” He gives the name of testament, or “covenant,” to that bargain he made with man, when he gave him the law, that they should be his people, and he should be their God; which bargain is called a testament in the Scripture, because it contains a promise of inheritance, and requires to be confirmed by the death of the testator, as it really was by the death of Christ, as a sign of which Moses sprinkled the whole people with blood, saying, “This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you,” Exod. 24, and Heb. 9.

He calls the law that God gave us “His testimonies,” because, as we have already stated, through the law God testifies his will to us. With those, then, who seek for the compact entered into by God with man to observe it, and, in like manner, seek for the law of God to carry it out, that is, with men of good will, fearing and loving God, he deals with such in the law of mercy and truth.

11. “For thy name’s sake, O Lord, thou wilt pardon my sin: for it is great.” From the general law in which God deals with those that fear him, the Prophet infers that he has a fair hope of his sins being forgiven. “For thy name’s sake, O Lord,” to make known thy mercy and thy truth, “Thou wilt pardon my sin, for it is great.” The word great may signify numerous, as a great people, in which sense St. James uses it, when he says, “We all offend in many things:” or, on account of the magnitude and the grievousness of the sins, for holy souls look upon trifles as grievous, which trifles are really grievous, if we consider the greatness of the person offended.

12. “Who is the man that feareth the Lord? He hath appointed him a law in the way he hath chosen.” The Prophet is now like one in love, now sighing for what he loves, now praising it, again sighing and longing for it. The just man was in love with the grace of God, ardently longed for the forgiveness of his sins, for the grace of living well, and pleasing God, and, therefore, now asks God’s grace thereto; at one time he praises the grace, and declares the happiness of those that fear God, that is, of those who have got such a grace; and again he returns to desire and to ask for it. Thus, in this verse and the two following, he declares the advantages those who fear God enjoy. “Who is the man that feareth the Lord?” Let such a man come forward and learn from me what a fortunate man he is. The next sentence, “He hath appointed him a law in the way he hath chosen.” Many think this a part of the happiness herein before alluded to; that is to say, that man, fearing the Lord, will, in the first place, have the privilege of being instructed by God “in the way he hath chosen;” that is in the state of life he may select. Not a bad interpretation, but I prefer another. The prophets are very much in the habit of repeating the same idea twice in the same verse, sometimes for explanation; and I imagine the meaning of the passage, “Who is the man that feareth the Lord?” to be: Who, I say, is the man that God has instructed in his law, in the way that man has selected; that is, in the direct path of living a holy life, and moving to God, which he has already chosen of his free will. One part of the verse thus explains the other, for that is he who fears God, who, by his grace, chooses the road to him, which road is none other than the observance of the commandments.

13. “His soul shall dwell in good things: and his seed shall inherit the land.” The happiness of the man fearing God consists in this, that “his soul,” the man fearing the Lord “shall dwell in good things,” shall enjoy those good things, not for a while, or in a transitory way, but forever, permanently. Nothing can be more true, for “To them that love God, all things work together unto good,” as the apostle, in his epistle to the Romans, has it. Therefore, he that fears God must be always happy. In prosperity he will know how to enjoy it; in adversity, patience and the hope of a great reward in the kingdom of heaven will come to his help. Thus, he will always be glad, and rejoice. And himself will not only dwell in good things, but even his children; “His seed shall inherit the land;” inheritance and possession signifying the same thing, as we have already explained in Psalm 15. The children of those who fear God will possess the land, because they will live in peace therein, without any one to injure them, in the sense we have alluded to; because to the good “All things work together unto good;” and their very tribulations become a source of joy and merit.

14. “The Lord is a firmament to them that fear him: and his covenant shall be made manifest to them.” The reason why those who fear God shall always “Dwell in good things,” is, because they do not depend on perishable and transitory things, but God himself is “their firmament;” that is, their hope is based on the friendship and help of God. Firmament means foundation, on which they rest, that foundation being God himself; and their reason for depending on him is, because “his covenant” makes it “manifest to them.” They who fear God know right well, and often call to mind, the treaty he entered into with man, to be their God, and to be a most loving parent to them, on the condition of their observing his laws; and they can, therefore, understand how, by reason of this compact, they can depend upon God, as upon a most solid foundation.

15. “My eyes are ever toward the Lord: for he shall pluck my feet out of the snare.” Having enlarged for a while on the happiness of those that fear the Lord, he now returns to wish and to pray for it: “My eyes are ever towards the Lord.” My mind’s eye has God ever before it, as being entirely dependent on him. The most effectual mode of prayer is, for one to place himself in a most abject position, before the one from whom help is expected, and to propitiate the benignity of the great, rather by modestly, silently, and quietly pointing to his poverty, than by stunning them with his clamor. As we have in Psalm 122, “As the eyes of the handmaid are on the hands of her mistress; so are our eyes unto the Lord our God until he have