

# The God Who Helps

by D.A. Carson

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*D.A. Carson's sermon highlights the assurance of God's help through life's difficulties, encouraging personal testimony and dedication to His will.*

**Duration:** 52:14

**Scripture:** Psalm 40:1-3, Psalm 40:6-8, Psalm 40:11, Psalm 40:16, Psalm 139:13-14, Isaiah 50:4-5, Romans 12:1, Hebrews 10:5-7

**Topics:** "Divine Providence", "True Religion"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the need to trust in God's help in times of trouble, acknowledging our dependence on Him and the ongoing need for His mercy and protection. It highlights the importance of giving thanks to God publicly, teaching others to trust in His goodness and sovereignty. The sermon also explores the concept of true religion as a response to God's grace, where we humbly acknowledge our need for His help and surrender to His will.

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## Transcript

Let us pray together. We thank you, Heavenly Father, for the mercy and condescension that bring you to help us again and again. In truth, you have declared you have not, because you ask not.

So we come before you and ask this evening, ask that you will speak to us from your own word that we may see you more clearly, trust you more wholly, obey you more instantly, love you more truly, and find in you our help in every need. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

If you live long enough, you will get kicked in the teeth. The only thing that will prevent it is not living long enough. If you live long enough, you will be bereaved.

The only alternative is bereaving someone else. If you live long enough, you will face major disappointment. You may lose a job.

You may lose a friend. You may lose a marriage. You may find yourself impoverished.

Or you may find yourself so enslaved by vicious sins that you loathe yourself. You are so addicted to the porn on the internet and you don't know what to do. Or you have nurtured wretched bitternesses against members of your family and you don't know how to escape.

You know it's not right. It is poisoning you. And you don't have a clue what to do about it.

If you live long enough, you will get kicked in the teeth. And to all such who sense their need on front after front after front, this psalm that was read for us earlier this evening, Psalm 40, speaks volumes of relief. God is our helper.

Now, sometimes we are inclined to think of the psalms as 150 individual pearls on a string. But many of the psalms are grouped together in important ways. Psalm 37 underscores the importance of waiting on God.

Psalms 38 and 39 give us the application of this waiting on God theme, worked out in painful self-examination. And now, in Psalm 40, at least initially, the gloom is lifted. There is a triumphant outcome.

David has waited on the Lord, and the Lord has helped him. And that brings us to the first of the two major divisions of the psalm. In verses 1 to 10, the psalm is full of joyful praise to the God who helps.

This can usefully be broken down into four stanzas, four parts. Number one, personal testimony, verses 1 to 3. Verse 1 bursts with delight. I waited patiently for the Lord.

He turned to me and heard my cry. This rendering is almost too weak. It's almost too static.

I waited patiently. I was sort of stuck there, and I waited, and eventually He showed up. That's not the idea.

This is an active, purposive, resolved waiting. I waited, waited for the Lord. And He came and fulfilled His promise and met me.

Now, what was it that David was saved from? Verse 2 describes it metaphorically. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire. He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand, some miry bog.

The image suggests both disgust and floundering helplessness. But what was it? Sickness? Enchaining sin? Discouragement? Peril from enemies? Don't have a clue. And this is one of the places where it's a great blessing that we don't have a clue.

For if we knew exactly what it was, we would be inclined to make appropriate application only if we were in exactly the same peril. But by preserving the metaphor and not identifying it precisely, God has given us a kind of generic insight. We can fall into many different kinds of bogs, and God is our only rescuer.

One is reminded of Paul's thorn in the flesh in 2 Corinthians chapter 12. There was given me, Paul says, a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to teach him humility. What the thorn in the flesh was? Well, there have been scores of answers.

In my mind, I can narrow them down to a probable three or four. Beyond that point, I can't quite be certain. And once again, the metaphorical ambiguity is a great help.

I don't know you. Most of you I don't know. But God knows you intimately, and he knows what kind of bogs you are either in or have come through or will fall into if you live long enough.

And here, this psalm provides David's testimony precisely to that kind of experience. David, extending the metaphor, has been rescued from this slimy pit, from this miry bog. Not mere escape, like Jeremiah in Jeremiah 38, but now with a new place on which to stand.

Even so, quite remarkably, David does not focus all of his attention on his own release, as if he were the center of the universe. Rather, immediately, his words give praise to God and flow outward to others. Verse 3, he put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.

Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. New song language in the Scripture always marks some new blessing from God that then evokes a new song. It's as if all the songs that we've already sung are inadequate to praise God for the new blessings that we've received.

The most remarkable new song passage in all of Holy Scripture, of course, is the one found in the great apocalyptic vision of Revelation 4 and 5. Do you recall it? In Revelation 4, God is presented in colorful metaphors, spectacular apocalyptic language as the sovereign God, the transcendent God, the creator God. Before Him, all of the highest orders of angelic beings bow before Him and cast their thrones before Him. They acknowledge their utter dependence upon Him, and they come together and sing, You are worthy because you have created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.

Once then this setting is established, God transcendent, God powerful, God the creator. Then the drama unfolds. Revelation 4 is to Revelation 5 what a setting is to a drama.

Once God's great transcendent glory is established in the setting of chapter 4, the drama unfolds in chapter 5. In the right hand of Him who sits on the throne, we're told, is a scroll sealed with seven seals. That scroll has all of God's purposes for redemption and judgment. That's what the scroll contains, all of God's purposes for the entire universe for judgment and redemption, and it is sealed with seven seals.

In the symbolism of the day, whatever is in that scroll can be enacted only if you slip the seals. For example, the last will and testament of the emperor Vespasian likewise was sealed with seven seals, and though people knew what was inside, the will as it were went to probate once the seals were slit. That is what effected what was in the document.

And so in the drama, this scroll with all of God's purposes is sealed with seven seals, and now a mighty angel challenges the entire universe, who is worthy to approach this God and take the scroll from His right hand and slit the seals, and thus bring about all of God's purposes for redemption and judgment. And no one is found who is worthy, not the cherubim and seraphim, not the elders, no one on the earth, no one under the earth in the abodes of the dead, no angel. And John weeps.

John weeps not because he's a nosy parker whose curiosity is thereby stifled, but because in the symbolism of the vision, this means that God's purposes for judgment, justice, and blessing will not be brought to pass. And as he's weeping, an interpreting elder taps him on the shoulder, as it were, and he says, John, John, stop your weeping. Look, the lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed to open the scroll.

So I looked, John says, and I saw a lamb. We're not to think that two animals parked side by side, a lion and a lamb. Apocalyptic literature loves to use mixed metaphors.

The lion is the lamb. He's the lion of the tribe of Judah, but he's also the lamb of God who was slaughtered, a slaughtered lamb. Yet a lamb with seven horns in the symbolism of the day, that means a slaughtered sacrificial lamb that nevertheless has the perfection of all kingly power.

That's what the horn symbolizes in ancient apocalyptic literature. And in consequence of this, because he comes from the throne itself and takes the scroll out of the hand of him who sits on the throne, he prevails to bring about all of God's purposes for judgment and blessing. Therefore, the cherubim and the elders and 10,000 times 10,000 angels surrounding the throne, they open up with all of the orchestra and they sing a new song.

And what is this song? It's no longer the song praising God for creation. As great as that song is, as legitimate as it is, as perennial as it is, it is a song addressed to Christ. You are worthy to open the scroll, for he shed his blood to rescue men and women drawn from every tongue and tribe and people and nation.

They shall reign in the new heaven and the new earth. Here is a new song brought about by the new event in redemptive history of the lion lamb bringing about all of God's purposes. Now, this vision here in Psalm 40 is not quite so salvation historically transcendent.

I understand that. And yet in our experience is there not time when we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good. We too know that God is faithful.

We have known of God's provision in the past. And then we go through some new agonizing thing. God pours out his grace upon us in spectacular ways and we sing a new song.

Sometimes it's after bereavement. Sometimes in the life of the church it's after decades of a really difficult challenging situation. And then suddenly there is massive movement.

In the province of Quebec where I grew up, my father was one of the first pastors back into French Canada after liberalism had decimated the relatively few churches in a population of about six and a half million French speakers. He started in the late 30s with another man, a man from Switzerland, William Frey. And gradually numbers of pastors from the United States and from English Canada returned, started planting churches.

There was a lot of persecution. Baptist ministers alone spent eight years in jail between 50 and 52. We kids were regularly beaten up because we were maudits protestants, damned protestants.

As recently as 1972 there were only about 35 or 36 evangelical churches of any description, most with not more than 40 people in all of this population of six and a half million. And then in eight years we grew from 35 churches to 500. And God put a new song in our mouths, even praise to our God.

Here is personal testimony. One of the wonderful things is that David immediately turns that to public principle. That's the second point, verses four and five.

He turns the personal testimony to public principle. Instead of talking in the first person, he now talks about the third person. He connects the two sections by a little hook word.

Have you noticed? The end of verse three, many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. And now he talks generically, verse four, blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods. Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders you have done.

The things you planned for us, no one can recount to you. This is wonderful. There is reflection now in David on all of the good things that God has done.

You come through one of these wretched experiences. You come out the other side of a miry bog and it gives time for you to take a deep breath and think about all God's plans for you. And you look back and think again and marvel at all of God's goodness.

There is a marvelous parallel passage to this in Psalm 139, sometimes I think slightly misunderstood. Do you recall Psalm 139, verse 13? For you created my heart and my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. I know that full well.

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. Do you see, this is not simply a passage that is marveling at God's omniscience. How can you ever possibly begin to grasp the innumerable thoughts of God? No, in the flow of the sequence, it is very personal.

God has created us in the womb and His sovereignty is so sweeping that even before we are born, our days are ordained for us. God knows the terrible things we will be going through, the bogs in this fallen and broken world that we will ourselves fall into. He knows them all.

His sovereignty is extended even to all of these details. He thinks about them. He knows about them all and all of His thoughts concerning us are innumerable.

Still, He can be trusted as the sovereign good God who comes to rescue His people. And then in the third place, there is personal self-dedication, verses 6 to 8. What is the only proper response for such deliverance? Slaughter a lamb, perhaps? Bring a bull? Bring a turtle? Well, maybe you're poor, so two turtle doves will do instead. Is that an adequate response to this sort of God? Ultimately, we must bring our entire being to God, our heart and will.

So we read, sacrifice and offering you did not desire. Now the next line is extremely difficult. I'll come back to it.

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced. Burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, here I am, I have come.

It is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God. Your law is within my heart.

Now the general thought in these three verses is clear. Mere formal offering of sacrifice is not an adequate response to a God who saves us from all of these miry bogs and whose sovereignty extends to every dimension of our life, who can be trusted with helping us in all kinds of situations. The only adequate response is to say, here I am, I have come to do your will.

It's the only ultimate response that is even the beginnings of being adequate. And yet before we press farther, we do need to think about this second line in verse six. It is difficult to understand.

Many English versions have, sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced. And the Hebrew verb can be understood that way. And then people wonder if this is a reflection of something

that takes place in the book of Exodus, Exodus 21.

In the ancient world, sometimes people fell into slavery because of raiding parties or military activity. But sometimes they fell into slavery because there were no chapter 11 and chapter 13 laws. There were no bankruptcy laws.

So you borrowed some money, then your business went belly up, and the only way out was to sell yourself and perhaps your family into slavery. But perhaps in fact, you fell into the hands of a really good master who provided you with food and shelter for you and your family, at a time perhaps when the unemployment rate is a nasty 20 or 25 percent. Under Jewish law, when the Israelites were actually observing it, after a set number of years, then you were supposed to be released.

In other words, slavery in Israel was not supposed to be open-ended. It was a form of indentured service rather than being open-ended. But supposing somebody came to the end of this period, the seven years of indentured service, and then looked around and saw that the economy wasn't very good and the master was really good.

Maybe he should just stay on as a slave. It might be just a wee bit better. Then he went through an ear-piercing ceremony.

His earlobe was put on the door of the master's house, and the master took a sharp awl and just pierced his ear. It was a way of saying from henceforth, this man will belong to this household. So perhaps that's what he's saying.

From now on, David will belong to the household of God. Now the problem with that interpretation is that everything we know about this ear-piercing ceremony, and it's not much, but everything we know about it describes only one ear being pierced. But here the text says, my ears you have pierced.

Now there's another way of understanding that verb in Hebrew, and literally it means, my ears you have dug out. Now what does that mean? If you were reading the ESV, you'll note that reading at the bottom of the page, my ears you have dug out. Now if you don't know what that means, you never met my mother.

My mother was an Englishwoman, a Cockney, born in the east end of London within the sound of bow bells. And she brought with her to Canada when she came as an immigrant, all kinds of interesting expressions that I have only heard from other Cockneys. And one of them, which she repeated to us when we were children pretty often was, dig out your ears.

This was not meant to be taken literally, neither with a spade nor with a Q-tip. It was merely a way of saying, listen up, what's blocking your ears? Pay attention. Which is why the ESV main text has rather paraphrastically rendered it, you have given me an open ear.

Did you see? And that makes sense too. In other words, what is required here is not merely offering of sacrifice, but an open ear before the Lord so that we hear what He says and listen to Him. In fact, there is a wonderful passage in one of the Servant Songs of Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 50, with exactly the same thought.

Not the same verb, but the same thought. Here is Isaiah 54 and following where the suffering servant of Yahweh says, the sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.

The sovereign Lord has opened my ears and I have not been rebellious. I have not drawn back. I offered my back to those who beat me.

My cheeks to those who pulled out my beard. Do you see, this is an anticipation of the suffering servant's suffering. An anticipation of Jesus crying in Gethsemane, not my will but yours be done.

Because His heavenly Father gave Him an open ear, not a blocked ear, a dug out ear, so that He listened to the word of His heavenly Father and was perfectly obedient. If David was obedient in measure, how much more great David's greater son. But there is an even deeper thing to think about here.

When this verse was translated from the Hebrew in which it was written into ancient Greek, 200 or more years before Christ, so that Jews were scattered in the ancient empires could read it, they rendered it differently again. They rendered it this way, sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me. Now where did they get that? And the reason that's important is because that's the way it's actually quoted in the New Testament, as we'll see in a few moments.

Now I can't prove what I will propose to you. I can't quite prove it just because we don't have enough information. But sometimes when you translate you have to find an equivalent expression simply because the receptor language doesn't work exactly the same way.

For example, I can tell you, tomorrow morning I'm flying home. And you understand what I mean. But I was brought up in French.

And you know, in French they don't have a word for home. They just don't. They say, je vais chez moi, to my place, or je vais à la maison, I'm going to my house, or chez nous.

But there's actually no word in French for home. Le foyer, the hearth, the foyer. But no actual word for home.

So you have to find some sort of equivalent to get the same idea across. And I suspect some translator two or three centuries before Jesus saw this Hebrew, my ear you have dug out, and thought, what am I going to do with this one? That doesn't make any sense in Greek. But he realized that it really did have to do with trying to listen to the word of God so that with my whole being I bow before him and obey him.

So he rendered it somewhat paraphrastically. So my whole body you prepared, I prepared, was prepared for you. A body you prepared for me, rather.

A whole body you prepared for me so that with my whole being I respond to you. With my whole body in life. I suspect that is what the translator did.

Now we'll look at how this is quoted in the New Testament in a few moments. In any case, the main thought, whether the ESVs paraphrase or the ancient Greek, is pretty clear. David says religious right and sacrifice.

That's not the crucial issue. But do I offer myself to you because I listen to your word? With my whole being I respond with body and will and soul and mind. I said, here I am.

I have come to do your will. In fact, it's written about me in the scroll. This may even have an intimation here of prophecy so that great David's greater son actually is the subject written about in antecedent scripture.

Great David thus becomes a picture of his son who is the subject of the scroll of God, the word of God, and he fulfills this so perfectly as we shall see. I desire to do your will, O my God. Your law is written in my heart.

And that brings us then to the passage that quotes this in the New Testament. It is found in the epistle of the Hebrews, chapter 10. The epistle of the Hebrews, chapter 10.

This is in the context where Hebrews is talking about the ways in which the Old Testament sacrificial system pointed forward to the ultimate sacrifice. The ancient tabernacle pointed forward to the very presence of God, the heavenly tabernacle. Indeed, we read, chapter 10, verse 1, the law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the realities themselves.

For this reason it can never by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year make perfect those who draw near to worship. Skipping down to verse 5, therefore, when Christ came into the world, and now these words, sacrifice and offering you did not desire but a body you prepared for me. With burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.

Then I said, here I am. It is written about me in the scroll. I have come to do your will, O God.

First he said, sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them, though the law required them to be made. That was true in David's day. It was true in Hosea's day, who says something very similar.

The law did require them, but they can't have this final efficacy if they can be shunted aside for something more fundamental. Indeed, then he said, here I am. I have come to do your will.

And the perfection of the obedient will of the Son issues in the incarnation and in the death of the Son, his own body bearing our sin in his own body on the tree. In other words, Jesus, obedient to the law, transcends David's, but it's already pictured in David, who understands that biblical religion is not mere religiosity. There is a form of religion that comes and participates in the hymn singing and participates in the Lord's Supper and reads the Bible now and then and shows up at annual meetings and things like that, but nevertheless does not learn to say, your will be done.

You are sovereign. You are God. You own me.

Dig out my ears that I may listen. Let me be yours in thought and word and deed, my whole body serving you. Isn't that same thought found in the Apostle Paul? Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

And before that, I beseech you, brothers, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. There is Paul saying something very similar to David. Do you see? But the ultimate one who hears God's word in this way is Christ himself, and it takes him to the cross.

That is what is required of us by way of response to the fact that God takes us out of miry bogs. And then in the fourth place, there is public proclamation, verses 9 and 10. I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly.

I do not seal my lips, as you know, oh Lord. I do not hide your righteousness in my heart. That is, I don't hide it in my heart so that it's entirely private.

I announce it. I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly.

Now, I know full well that there are different styles of displays of thanksgiving that are, in part, culture-driven. I understand that. This is true even in greetings, isn't it? A number of years ago, I worked part-time with the World Evangelical Fellowship, and part of my job was bringing people together, Christians, leaders, pastors and theologians from around the world to work on one project or another.

Just watching them enter a room was an education. In came the German and shook everybody's hands. And if you had to go out to the car again to get something, you'd probably shake everybody's hands on the way out, too.

And then in came one of the Latins. And if he was an Arab Christian, it's usually three kisses, and I could never remember which cheek to start on, which always gets embarrassing when you get close. And then, of course, the Indian is coming in with a lot of this.

And the Japanese is coming in with a lot of this. And how far down you go depends on who's older and who's got more money and who's got more education, who's got a more prestigious job. And I can never remember all the rules.

Just bow down. Just bow down. Then you're honoring the other side.

And off in the corner was an Englishman in his Harris tweed coat, standing there looking somewhat bemused at all of this energetic greeting. And he stood there. I won't mention his name, I dare not.

As Pablo Perez from Mexico descended on him, all three hundred pounds of him. Brother, he said. And the Englishman looked up and said, have we been introduced? In comes the American.

Hi, everybody. Sorry I'm late. This is before you start your conversation.

Culture, culture. It's spectacular, isn't it? And, of course, this sort of thing comes out also in how we give thanks to God. There are some people who come from more Latin temperaments or more charismatic traditions.

Do you know? To me, they seem a wee bit over the top. They have a little snuffle, some small cold, something that nobody else would even mention. And when it comes to testimony time, Sunday night, oh, the Lord healed me from a dread disease.

It was a wonderful thing. I had sniffles. And now the Lord has healed me.

Praise God. And I want to say, good grief, it was a snuffle. And then there's the other sort, more tied perhaps to an Anglo-Saxon temperament with a wee swift of Scottish reserve.

You lose your spouse, your house burns down, you get sacked from your job, and your dog dies. And you're asked by some believer, how's it going? Things have been better. Some years go by and you're happily remarried, you've rebuilt your business, you live in a lovely house, and you have a new border collie.

And somebody asks, and how's it going? There's a lot to be grateful for. David is realistic. You see, I think sometimes, some of us from more reserved traditions are afraid to let it hang out, lest people will look down on us.

But David's not quite in that camp, is he? He's gone from preaching to start meddling. Listen to what David says. This is the word of God now.

This is the word of God. I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly. I do not seal my lips, as you know, O Lord.

I do not hide your righteousness in my lips. I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your truth and love from the great assembly.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, those of us who have been through these deep waters, owe it to the entire assembly to speak of God's goodness and mercy in the public arena, so that others, a new generation coming along behind, those who have not had many miry bogs yet, learn how to give thanks to God. You see, it's not just that you show the way, as it were, a kind of example, a kind of mentor for actually going through the bog. You also show the way for how to give thanks afterwards.

And as Christians give thanks to God Almighty for all of the blessings they've received, not least in the hardest times, they teach a whole new generation to trust the living God. Let me tell you of a seminary student I know. We'll call him John.

John went out as a single missionary to Bolivia. And while he was there, in his mid-late thirties, he married a woman, female missionary out there. And they had a child, a little girl, three or four, when they came to Trinity to do a Ph.D. His mission wanted him to get advanced training so that he could go back and up the level of theological instruction in Bolivia.

By this time, he knew the language well. He understood the culture. He wanted to be there all the rest of his life.

So they agreed to pay for his doctoral studies at Trinity. He was there a bare six months when she was diagnosed with stage four breast cancer. She went through all of the wretched treatments and looked as if she was going to make it.

He got back to his studies again, seminars, trying to write and prepare for his comps before the dissertation, when he was diagnosed with advanced stomach cancer. Chicago has a lot of really excellent cancer hospitals, not least the Lutheran General. They wouldn't touch him.

They said it was so advanced there wasn't anything they could do. The mission agreed to send him up to the Mayo Clinic. They took out 90% of his stomach and put him on rather experimental drugs used primarily for colon cancer.

And lo and behold, they stopped it. He came out, all six foot four of him, already thin, now skinny as a bean pole, needing to eat a little something every two or three hours because he didn't have any stomach to store things. And he came back to seminary, finished his comps, started on his dissertation, and then his wife's cancer returned and she died.

He was surrounded by godly people. They both came from godly families. The Trinity community helped every way they could.

In due course, he came back and he finished his dissertation. The last time I saw him was three or four years ago. He came back to our home church in Illinois, which is one of his supporting churches, to speak there just before going back with his daughter, now nine or ten, to Bolivia as a missionary.

And for half an hour, all he spoke about using Scripture was the goodness of God. And I want to tell you that is merely normal Christianity. That's all it is.

It's not heroic. It's merely seeing things in an eternal perspective. He spoke of all the manifestations of goodness and all the people who had helped and showered time and energy and gifts on him.

He spoke of the love that he and his wife had shared, their wonderful daughter. The Lord had preserved at least one of the parents to bring up this little girl. He spoke of the privilege of service, of telling people more urgently than ever how we are all destined to die and after that the judgment.

And that at the end of the day, death may be the last enemy, but it does not have the last word. For we know someone who broke the bounds of death and therefore he could not live his life in fear. Death is outrageous, but it's not final.

And he spoke of the goodness of God. Brothers and sisters in Christ, when you finally do come out the other side of your miry bog, don't slink into an endless pity party. Give thanks to God in the assembly and teach a new generation the goodness of God.

Now the second division of the psalm I can cover in three or four minutes, but it is important to understand how it works. Here in verses 11 to 17 there is renewed anticipation of the God who helps. There is renewed anticipation of the God who helps.

Verse 11 can be understood either as a petition or as a statement. In the ESV, as a statement, as for you, O Lord, you will not restrain your mercy from me. Your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me.

Or in the NIV as a petition, do not withhold your mercy from me, O Lord. May your love and your truth always protect me. It can be understood either way.

But what strikes you about this is, granted he's just come through a miry bog, why is David going on to talk about ongoing protection? Because, of course, just because you have lost a child does not necessarily mean that you will escape cancer. Just because you've been through a really, really difficult ecclesiastical situation does not necessarily mean that you won't face bereavement. This is still a damned world.

There are wonderful things here, signs of God's grace in so many ways, but yet this is still a death-dealing world. And David is astute enough to understand that just because God has taken him out of one miry bog, it doesn't mean there won't be any more miry bogs down the road. Don't we sing this? O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come.

And so he reminds himself that God must still be his helper. And then he runs through six domains where he still needs help, where he will always need help. One, God helps in the arena of personal sin.

Verse 12, For troubles without number surround me, my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails within me. You must help me with my sins, O God, for they make me drown.

And then second, God helps in the arena of bitter enemies. Verses 13-15. They do not have the right to take advantage of David's fall.

So although his own sin discourages him, the smug attacks of his enemies arouse him nevertheless with a sense of injustice. He is outraged by it, and only God can finally save here. Then third, God helps all who seek him, all that is who seek God's glory.

Do you see how he argues in verse 16? It is a wonderful passage. But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you. May those who love your salvation always say, the Lord be exalted.

Some versions have great is the Lord. In Hebrew it's just two words, Yigdal Yahweh. Now the next time R.C. Sproul is here and wants to quote Latin, I want you to quote Hebrew.

Put it on your fridge door. Memorize it. Y-I-G-D-A-L, Yigdal Yahweh.

Y-A-H-W-E-H, Yigdal Yahweh. Say it. Yigdal Yahweh.

Now you know some Hebrew. Yigdal Yahweh. So that when you are full of praise, when you see a glorious sunset, you will say, and when you have just come out of a funeral parlor where your closest friend has died, you will say, and when you come to church and the organ swells and you see something of the majesty of God and the preached word, you will say, and when you are hungry and tired and distressed and yet you know that God has sustained you even in the midst of tears, you will say, may the Lord be exalted.

May the Lord be exalted. May the Lord be exalted. May the Lord be exalted.

For do you see? God is not our helper like some genie who comes along and gives a little bit of assistance. The help he gives is always within the framework in which God is God. And we respond by saying your will be done.

Yigdal Yahweh. May the Lord be exalted. Which brings us to the final lines.

God helps even me. Verse 17. I am poor and needy.

May the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer. Oh my God, do not delay.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, religion broadly demands that we do certain things in order to get blessings from God. Certainly ancient paganism was like that. If you wanted to make a sea voyage, then you offered a sacrifice to Neptune, the God of the sea, in the hope that the God of the sea would smile on you and give you a safe sea voyage.

If you wanted to make a speech, then you offered a sacrifice to the God of communication, Mercury in the Roman world, Hermes in the Greek world. You offered something in a kind of tit for tat relationship. That's the way religion works.

You do nice things to God and then God does nice things to you. You scratch my back, I scratch your back. But supposing you're dealing with a God to whom you really can give nothing, who already owns it all.

A God with whom you cannot possibly barter. Then what does religion look like? That's why the religion of the Bible is not religion in any standard sense at all. It is a disclosure of the living God in grace who comes along to help us.

And we, his creatures, first of all acknowledge our creatureliness, then our guilt, and bow before him and accept his sovereignty and his forgiveness. There is no other proper relationship with this living God. And finally, we bow before him on bended knee in contrition and brokenness because we know that we don't have something to trade with him.

Nothing in my hands I bring. Only to thy cross I cling. Naked, come to thee for dress.

Helpless, look to thee for rest. Foul, I to the fountain fly. Wash me, Savior, or I die.

And so we come to the cross and to the God who sent his son. And we find him always a help in time of need to those who cry, I am poor and needy, O Lord. Yigdal Yahweh.

May the Lord be exalted. Let us pray. Forgive the swiftness, O Lord God, with which we turn again to arrogance and one-upmanship and ridiculous independence when in fact your sovereign grace is so sweeping that every breath we draw is by your decree.

Every beat of the heart is by your sanction. If you take away our breath, it is gone. Not a sparrow falls from the heaven except by your sanction.

And we live and move and have our being simply because Christ reigns with all of the mediatorial authority that comes from your throne. We thank you, Lord God, that we are dependent creatures. We thank you, Lord God, that we who have tasted and seen that the Lord is good are forgiven dependent creatures already with the gift of the Spirit as the down payment of the promised inheritance.

We bow before you in thanksgiving and we acknowledge afresh that you alone are God. May the Lord be exalted for Christ's sake. Amen.

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Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/owlwa053vyg.mp4>

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