

In The LORD I Take Refuge

Psalm 11

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Ames, Iowa

Sept. 14, 2025

There have been some traumatic events in our country over the past few weeks. On August 27, a shooter opened fire on the Catholic school in Minneapolis. Then, only a few days ago, the world watched the video of the young Ukrainian woman who was killed on a commuter train in Charlotte, North Carolina. Then, on September 10, a gunman assassinated conservative commentator and the leader of Turning Point USA, Charlie Kirk. When you set these tragedies alongside all of the other things that have occurred in our nation (and the world), like the corruption in our politics, the unraveling of the moral fabric of our culture, we are tempted to conclude what King David's friends and counselors said to him in Psalm 11:3,

"If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

Psalm 11 addresses the moment of crisis we face today that causes us to say with David's counselors and friends:

*"Everything around me seems broken. What kind of world are we living in?
What kind of world will my children or grandchildren grow up in? If the
foundations are destroyed, what will we do?"*

When King David faced these crises, his counselors and friends told him to despair and run away. They advised him to give up. But instead of hiding from the crisis and fleeing from his problems, he doubled down on his faith in God. He found refuge in the middle of the storm of his crisis in the unshakable character of God. Listen to me: *David fled to God, but he didn't flee from the fight.* He fixed his eyes on his Savior and stayed the course with his faith firmly planted in God.

Friends, Psalm 11 is short. It is only seven verses—but it wrestles with a huge question: *What can the righteous do when the foundations of our lives, families, culture, and our nation seem to be destroyed?*

David's friends and counselors told him to run away from his problems. However, David took his eyes off himself and his crisis and looked up to God. By faith, he saw that the throne of God was unshaken, and that was the *turning point* for him. David remained firm in his faith in God, even when his friends and advisors counseled him to abandon all hope. He trusted in the God, who ruled and reigned over the foundations that seemed to be crumbling when no one else did.

I want us to walk through Psalm 11 and unpack these seven verses. Then we will make our applications at the end. In the biblical overview, we will look at *David's trust, David's temptation, David's test, and David's triumph.*

I. David's trust (v. 1a)

The superscription of this psalm reads, *"To the choirmaster. Of David."* It tells us that Psalm 11 was composed to be sung and that the composer was King David. On the other hand, it doesn't tell us anything about the historical setting of the psalm. Most likely, David wrote it when he and the nation were in extreme distress.

Whatever the specific circumstances were that prompted him to write Psalm 11, it was obviously a time of national crisis. All around him, it seemed like the moral and spiritual foundations of the nation were crumbling. These circumstances were caused by evil men who sought to end his life and destroy Israel. To compound this situation, David's counselors and friends were panicking. Yet, in the middle of the chaos, David kept his eyes fixed on the LORD, so when he wrote this poem, he opened it with a rock-solid confession of his faith in God:

In the LORD I take refuge.

This was David's trust. It was the only solid foundation that could endure such upheaval. However, in vv. 1b-3, we hear how David was tempted to abandon the LORD.

II. David's temptation (vv. 1b-3)

So, in vv. 1b-3, we get the picture of the situation he was dealing with as a result of the national crisis. His friends, counselors, and those closest to him came to him with their urgent advice, and what we hear in these verses is David talking back to them in utter shock at their failure to trust God. Listen to his reply to them after they advise him to run away. He says:

How can you say to my soul [to me], "Flee like a bird to your mountain, ² for behold, the wicked bend the bow; they have fitted their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart; ³ if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

We can picture the scene. David is surrounded by his political counselors, military advisors, and, perhaps, his closest confidants. They are well-meaning in their advice, but they have given up. They were not trusting in the LORD. They were trusting in their own ability to endure the circumstances. So, their advice was for him to *flee Jerusalem* and go into hiding. Listen to what they said:

"David, their arrows are nocked on the string. These wicked men are pulling back their bows! They have found places to hide in the shadows so they can shoot to kill you. Get out while you can! Run for the hills!"

It's the same fear-filled advice we hear today, isn't it? Well-meaning friends and family members tell us:

"Just stay quiet about your faith in Jesus. Don't speak up. After all, you can't make a difference—it's too late for the church and this country. Just protect yourself, your family, and don't get involved."

However, what troubles David most is not the danger he faces but the despairing question of his friends in v. 3:

"If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

The "*foundations*" here likely referred to the moral and spiritual condition of the nation. It referred to how the nation practiced its biblical justice, biblical truth, and faithfulness to God's covenant. When those crumble, life feels unlivable.

It's the same today: When institutions fail, when laws designed to protect the innocent actually protect the criminal, when the wicked assassinate those who are speaking up for Christ, and when truth is mocked, we too wonder:

"What can the righteous do?"

This was David's temptation. He was tempted by those who were closest to him and loved him the most to simply give up and run away from his faith in God and abandon the fight. However, David knew his temptation was a test for him and his people.

III. David's test (vv. 4-6)

Listen to King David's answer to those who advised him to flee and run away from the fight. Look at v. 4a:

The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven;

David is calling for his counselors, and for us to lift our eyes higher than the earthly foundations that we see. Friends, the earthly foundations may shake, but God's throne does not. In v. 4a, David tells us that God is in His holy temple and that His throne is in heaven. The Hebrew word for "*temple*" is also translated as "*palace*."

David is telling us that God is in Heaven and He is reigning and ruling over the shaking foundations of their nation. He isn't on the run. He is not hiding, and He hasn't abdicated His throne in Heaven.

Not only that, God is actively testing mankind to see if they have unshakeable trust in the unshakeable God. You see, David's friends and counselors have made a grave mistake because the foundations that support His people are eternally secure. Yet, what we understand is that the LORD uses the chaos on the earth to test the faith of men, both righteous and unrighteous.

Look at the last part of v. 4,

His eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man.

David assigns human qualities to God using what we call *anthropomorphism*. We will see this frequently in the Bible, especially in the Psalms. Friends, God is not a man and He doesn't have fingers, hands, eyes, and eyelids. Anthropomorphic language is a literary device that teaches us about who God is and how God relates to us.

So, when 4b says that

God's eyes see, and His eyelids test the children of man.

David is telling us that God reigns, and He knows what is going on. The phrase, "*his eyelids test*," is the image of a person looking at something with intense *scrutiny*, as if they are *squinting or screwing up their eyes to bring it into focus so that it may be examined*.

Then in v. 5, we see that this intense scrutiny is the LORD looking into the hearts of mankind, both righteous and unrighteous. Look at what it says:

The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence.

The righteous are tested so they will know whether they are trusting in the LORD when the foundations of the world are shaking, or are they trusting in themselves? For the righteous, this "*testing*" is refining—like gold in fire. The Apostle Peter tells us in 1 Peter 4:12,

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

Through this test, the righteous endure, and their faith shines like pure gold. However, the wicked are revealed for who they are – they love violence. They are the ones who hide in the shadows and shoot at the righteous. They bend their bows and put the righteous in their crosshairs in order to kill them.

David tells us that these events test the righteous, but they bring judgment on the wicked. Now that their hearts have been revealed, David asks God to judge them for their treatment of the righteous. Look in v. 6:

Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.

King David prays for God's righteous judgment to be on the unrepentant wicked. David longs for God's holy hatred to be against all injustice. The language of fire, sulfur, and scorching winds looks back at God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah and also looks forward to the final judgment in Revelation.

The last part of v. 6 tells us that this is "*their cup*." The "*cup*" represents *the cup of judgment or the cup of wrath*. The imagery of "*the cup*" in the Scriptures refers to the *wrath of God that the wicked have stored up because of their sins. This cup will be "dispensed" or "drunk" on a specific day*, or what we may call *a day of judgment*. On that day, the wicked will drink the wrath of God that they have earned.

The *cup* also points forward to the cup of wrath that Jesus drank when He bore the sins of His people on the cross. Jesus received the wrath of God that we had been storing up. On the cross, Jesus drank that cup for His people so they wouldn't have to. He bore our sins in His body on the cross. This was how Jesus drank our cup of wrath for us.

So, this was David's test, and not only David's test but the test of the righteous and the unrighteous.

IV. David's triumph (v. 7)

"For the LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face."

Verse 7 concludes David's prayer with him acknowledging two of the LORD's key attributes. First, He is righteous, and second, He loves those who strive to practice righteousness.

Finally, David's prayer end with the promise that the:

"The upright shall behold his face."

Here's the deal: The promise to see God's face will not be attractive to you if you do not love Him. Bottom line: There is no motivation to see God if you do not delight in Him and treasure Him.¹

Pastor James Johnston tells the story of the death of his nephew's newborn baby. He said when they received the call that the child was dying, he drove his mother to the hospital to see her great-grandson. His nephew and his wife had named the boy after his grandfather (her husband), who had died several years ago. For Johnston's mother, the death of this little boy carried double sorrow because it reminded her of her husband, who had died, and also the loss of the precious baby boy.

He goes on to say that as they drove home, he told his mother how precious it will be for his dad (her husband) to welcome his grandson, who was named after him, to heaven. His mother said,

"Yes, that's true, but when we get to Heaven, we are going to see Jesus. The most wonderful thing will be to see him."

He says his mother had it exactly right. As wonderful as it will be to see believers who have gone before us, the most wonderful thing will be to see Jesus. If you have faith in Jesus, you will see this promise fulfilled, for you will *"behold his face."*

Friends, here's the main point of Psalm 11: *When the foundations of life seem to be collapsing and the wicked appear to prevail, the righteous must put their trust in the Lord, who is reigning and will judge the wicked and uphold the righteous.*

Now, let's make our final applications. I have five takeaways for Psalm 11:

1. You will be tempted to have fear over faith:

When you consider Psalm 11 as a whole, it sets two things in opposition to one another: *Fear and Faith*. Specifically, this Psalm addresses the horrors of the world and considers how those we love and trust, such as friends, family, and even mentors, may give us advice grounded in *fear* rather than *faith*.

Some of these well-meaning people may counsel us to abandon our pursuit of Jesus and flee the dangers of following Him. They may tell us to say nothing and keep our convictions to ourselves. They may tell us of the dangers and foolishness of following Jesus to the ends of the world to proclaim the gospel. They may tell us that by speaking out for Jesus, we will be in danger of being killed. Friends, you will be tempted to believe them and adopt a posture of fear over faith.

Remember what King David's counselors told him v. 2? They said his enemies had nocked the arrow to the string on their bows and bent the bow so that they were ready to shoot from the shadows and kill him. Today it won't be a bow, but the enemy will chamber the bullet, and from the shadows they will take aim at those whom they hate in the same way the guy shot Charlie Kirk this past week. They most certainly will shoot from the shadows of social media with threats of violence and death.

¹ James Johnston, *Preaching the Word: Psalms*, 131.

In this moment, you'd better have a solid understanding of the theology of suffering for the sake of the gospel. You had better understand that the LORD Jesus is your Refuge and listen to His words from the gospels. In Matthew 10:28, Jesus said:

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Then in Luke 9:23, Jesus said:

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

Finally, the Apostle John wrote in Revelation 12:11,

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

These are texts that remind us that the call to follow Jesus is the call to come and die for the sake of the gospel. You must first die to your selfish desires and then take up your cross and follow the risen Savior. Second, you must realize that by following Christ, there will be those who hate you and want to see you die, but we must not fear those who can kill the body but cannot touch the soul that belongs to Christ.

Friends, when this kind of persecution comes, it will seem like the foundations of your life are being destroyed. In that moment, we may be counseled to flee and shrink back in fear from our responsibility as disciples of Christ. This counsel may come from those whom we love and trust, and in that moment, it may even seem wise. However, it is in these moments that the eyes of our faith must see beyond this world and have a heavenly vision of our risen, reigning, and ruling Savior who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Friends, be prepared to be tempted to be filled with fear of your circumstances and abandon your call, instead of being secure in your faith and following Jesus.

2. You must understand the nature and dynamics of faith.

As we work our way through Psalms, one of these things I hope we come to love is how the Psalms keep us honest about the true nature of faith between the *"already"* and the *"not yet."* When I say the *"already"* and the *"not yet,"* I mean that Jesus has already won the victory, but it is not yet fully realized in this life.

So, we live in this in-between time, but even in this in-between time, we can have confidence that the victory is won. Yes, there will be spiritual battles on the way to our heavenly home. There will be days when we struggle with our faith and days when we experience the fullness of victory. This is life in the *"not yet."* We will experience the ups and downs of our faith.

Here's how the Psalms help us. There is a dynamic grittiness of our faith pictured in the Psalms, and we see this grittiness in Psalm 11. Faith laments, grieves, and rejoices. It has doubts and confidence. It is bold and yet fearful. It battles with its enemies while seeking peace. It walks through dark valleys and stands on mountain peaks. I love how Paul Tripp helps us grasp the dynamic of our faith in the Psalms in his book *Everyday Gospel*. He says:

Here [in the Psalms] we are confronted with the fact that a life of faith isn't easy; it's more of [a difficult and complex] journey than a paid vacation. But the book of Psalms, with all of its stark realism, doesn't leave us discouraged, depressed, or hopeless. It doesn't ask you to deny reality, nor does it allow you to let the fallenness of this sin-scarred world dominate your meditation,

because in the middle of all the realism is a God of righteousness, justice, and grace.²

Brothers and sisters, be prepared to journey through the “not yet” of this life with a dynamic but gritty faith in Jesus.

3. Be prepared for the testing of your faith:

The Hebrew word for “test” or “examine” in v. 5 refers to the process of purifying or proving that the metal is of the highest quality. So, when the foundations of the world are shaken, God tests the righteous to prove, purify, refine, and strengthen their faith in the One who is not shaken. According to the Apostle Peter, the LORD tests us . . .

So that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:7)

Listen, the testing of our faith leads to the strengthening of our faith. Now, listen to how this happens in our next point.

4. Worship as a means of grace to strengthen your faith.

I want to make this as practical and spiritual as possible, because it is easy to miss if we are not careful. We need to remember that Psalm 11 is not only poetry, but it’s a song. It was a song written during a time of struggle and trial, and after that, it became a song that the people of Israel sang when the foundations of their lives were shaken.

Here’s what this means. It means that it is crucial for us to sing worship songs that provide reassurance as we face similar times. Take your service guide and turn to page 8. Earlier, we sang *The Solid Rock*. Let’s think about the words of this hymn:

- 1. My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.*
 - 2. When darkness seems to hide His face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In ev’ry high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.*
 - 3. His oath, His covenant, His blood
Support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.*
 - 4. When He shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh, may I then in Him be found;
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.*
- (Chorus) On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.*

² Paul Tripp, *Everyday Gospel*, 200.

When the foundation of the world is crumbling, we need to sing worship songs that remind us that we have a gospel-foundation in God that will not be destroyed. Worship songs that are filled with the person and work of Christ (the gospel) anchor our faith in troubled times so that our hearts will be filled afresh with the Holy Spirit.

Listen, sometimes that strengthening comes all at once, and sometimes it is a slow process where our faith strengthens and then weakens, but then strengthens again. It will be like exercising a muscle. So, that persistently participating in gospel-shaped worship services strengthens that muscle of faith through singing, reading, confessing sin, gospel-community, and the faithful preaching of the word of God. Friends, worship is a means of anchoring our faith in the Solid Rock of Jesus and filling us with the Holy Spirit.

5. Remember the promise that the eyes of faith behold Jesus:

As we wrap up Psalm 11, we need to see that the object of our faith is Jesus Christ. Verse 6 tells us that if the wicked don't turn from their sin, they will drink the cup of God's wrath.

However, for those who have faith in Jesus, we know that He drank the cup of God's wrath for them. Matthew's Gospel tells us that in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus knew the horrors of drinking the cup of the wrath of God, so He asked that this cup pass from Him. Then, in complete submission to the will of God, He said,

"Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

Friends, because He drank that cup which we rightly deserved to drink, and all who have trusted in Jesus have a future that will not include the wrath of God.

When you have faith in Jesus, the promise of v. 7 becomes true for you. As the Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:21,

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This means that by your faith in Jesus, you are made righteous, and so the promise to behold the face of God in Christ is for you.

John Newton, who wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* when he was in prison, was also a prolific hymn writer. In his hymn, *Why Should I Fear the Darkest Hour*, " he says in the first two verses:

1. *Why should I fear the darkest hour,
Or tremble at the tempter's power?
Jesus vouchsafes to be my tower.*
2. *Though hot the fight, why quit the field?
Why must I either fly or yield,
Since Jesus is my mighty shield?*³

Friends, the fight of faith will be hot in the time of the *not yet*. There will be those who counsel us to give up the fight and flee for our lives, but in the words of John Newton,

*Why must I either fly or yield,
Since Jesus is my mighty shield?*

Friends, it is by faith that we stand firm in Christ when the foundation of this world crumbles. Flee to Jesus for He is our Mighty Tower.

³ <https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/731>.