

The Song of the Saved

Psalm 18

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Ames, Iowa

November 2, 2025

College football is in full swing. The season is almost halfway over. If you are like me, you are keeping up with your favorite team's chances of winning it all.

Can you imagine what it would be like to be on a team that has worked so hard all season, lost a couple of games, made the playoffs, and then won it all? Whether it is football, basketball, baseball, swimming, or any sport, you put in the work, and then you finally win the national championship. I've been on teams that have won championships, but none have ever won a national championship. I can't even begin to imagine what it would be like to win something like that. The feeling would have to be amazing.

The same sense of joy and euphoria from that experience is behind Psalm 18, only it is infinitely greater. David sang this song at the end of his life after God had given him victory over all of his enemies. He had almost exhausted his vocabulary describing his excitement and joy as he looked back on his life.

Let's do a high-level look at Psalm 18 before we get into it. First, Psalm 18 is a poetic narrative of David's life. In his song, he reflects on how God saved him. It is a psalm that celebrates God's faithfulness after years of danger, pursuit, and warfare. According to the superscription, David wrote it "*on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.*"

This psalm is a thanksgiving hymn that captures the journey from distress to deliverance, from fear to faith, from battle to blessing. It is one of the most personal and passionate portraits of God in all of Scripture.

Second, Psalm 18 is the fourth-longest Psalm with 50 verses. It appears almost verbatim in 2 Samuel 22, where David praises God for His faithfulness to him near the end of his life.

Third, this Psalm has a strong Messianic tone. By the time we reach v. 50, we learn that Psalm 18 points beyond David to his *offspring* — Jesus Christ — who triumphed over every enemy through His death and resurrection.

Here's the main idea of Psalm 18: *Psalm 18 teaches us to worship our King, who gave His life to be the source of our strength as we journey through life.*

Our journey through this life is often like Psalm 18. It is marked by mountains and valleys and storms and sunshine. Sometimes we find ourselves running from enemies, crushed by fear, or trapped in circumstances that seem impossible. Yet those are the moments when the only source of our strength is our King. Those are the moments when, by faith, we learn how to draw on the source of our strength.

Let's get to work on these 50 verses. I have five points to guide our journey through Psalm 18. Just a heads-up: since we are covering 50 verses, you will need to buckle up as we work through this Psalm.

I. The source of our hope is Christ (vv. 1-3)

As David looks back on his life, he doesn't begin with his troubles, but with his love and adoration for Yahweh. This is an interesting truth in this Psalm because most of us, when we try to explain our lives, begin with our troubles and then maybe we work toward God. We tend to see God through our problems, struggles, and difficulties in life, rather than the other way around.

Look again at what he said in v. 1,

I love you, O LORD, my strength.

The Hebrew word for *love* in this verse carries the idea of tender affection. It is usually used to describe God's tender love and compassion for His people. Yet here, King David uses it to describe his love for God. He opens his heart and confesses his great love for God.

Then, in v. 2, David piles metaphor upon metaphor to describe the security he finds in God. Look at what he says:

The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

David's tender love for God and his long years of lived experience with him created in his heart a deep well of hope. This hope was the *source of his worship* and praise of God. It gave him great confidence in God when life got hard.

So, when events in our lives rock our world, we don't focus on the fear but on the nature and character of God. We learn how to pray as David did. We remind ourselves of who God is and the hope He gives us in Christ. We remind ourselves that Jesus walked through the valley of the shadow of death and was saved so that when these dark moments come into our lives, we never walk alone. The bottom line is that when the battle rages in our hearts, minds, and in the circumstances of our lives, we call upon Christ, who is our Rock, our Fortress, our Deliverer in whom we take refuge.

We need to be careful in these moments not to define or interpret God through the crisis we are experiencing, but interpret our crisis through our faithful God. When we respond to God this way, He becomes the source of our hope in life's trials.

What trial or struggle or desert are you walking through right now? These trials can dry up our heart and soul, but in Christ, we can drink deeply from the wellspring of Jesus, who gives us strength. Call on Him for help and hope. Immerse yourself in His word and drink deeply.

II. The source of our rescue is Christ (vv. 4-19)

In vv. 4-19, David catalogs a long list of supernatural descriptions of what the Lord did to rescue him from death. These supernatural descriptions are apocalyptic imagery. What I mean is that they describe the earth and the cosmos being shaken by God's power as He rescues His people. It is a poetic description of David's distress and the Lord flexing His sovereign muscles to save him from his enemy. Listen to a summary of this list:

- *David's distress:*
 - *The cord of death encompassed me*
 - *The torrents of destruction assailed me*
 - *The cord of Sheol entangled me*
 - *The snares of death confronted me*
- *The LORD'S deliverance:*
 - *The earth reeled and rocked*
 - *The foundations of the mountains trembled because He was angry*
 - *Smoke went up from His nostrils and fire from his mouth*
 - *He bowed the heavens, and darkness was under his feet*
 - *He made darkness his covering*
 - *He sent hailstones and coals of fire before him*
 - *He thundered from heaven*
 - *He sent out arrows and scattered them*
 - *He flashed forth lightnings and routed them*
 - *He laid bare the foundation of the earth*
 - *He drew me out of the many waters*
 - *He rescued me from my strong enemy*
 - *He delighted in me and set me in a broad place*

In v. 6, David says that *in his distress, he called on the LORD*. He prayed to the LORD for help. The Hebrew word *distress* is the imagery of being squeezed under tremendous pressure on all sides. Then in v. 19, we see the LORD's deliverance. He answered his prayer, and the LORD *brought him out and set him in a broad place*. David went from crushing misery to glorious spaciousness in the presence of the Father simply because the LORD *delighted* in him.

David foreshadows Jesus in how God *delighted* in Him. In Isaiah 42:1, God says to His servant,
*Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I
 have put my Spirit upon him.*

In Matthew 3:17, we hear God speak from heaven after Jesus was baptized,
This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

Because the LORD was pleased with Jesus, when the cords of death encompassed Him and dragged Him down, they could not hold Him. All of the apocalyptic imagery that unfolded in vv. 4-19 all pointed to what would happen at the cross. Yet, the LORD *delighted* in Jesus and rescued Him from death by raising Him from the dead and setting Him at His right hand in Heaven. Now that Jesus is alive, He can rescue those who call on His name in their distress. So, are you calling on Christ in your distress and crisis?

Think about it this way: Here is the good news of the person and work of Christ on our behalf. When you trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, what's true of Jesus becomes true of you. Because the LORD *delights* in Jesus, He *delights* in you, and because the LORD rescued Jesus, He will rescue you. In this beautiful way, Jesus is the source of your rescue.

Listen, I don't know the LORD's timetable for your rescue. Most of us want immediate relief and rescue, don't we? That may not be the LORD's plan for you in this crisis. He has things to teach us about Himself that can only be learned in that crisis. We can study these things in Scripture, but then they are hammered out on the anvil of life as what we learn goes deep into our hearts. When this happens, you learn firsthand how Jesus is the source of your rescue.

III. The source of our righteousness is Christ (vv. 20-30)

Now we get to a troubling part of this hymn. Look at v. 20:

*The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the
 cleanness of my hands he rewarded me.*

Verse 20 sounds like David is claiming sinless perfection. Is that what he is doing? No. He is, however, claiming covenant faithfulness. Covenant faithfulness and sinlessness are not the same things. David is talking in Old Covenant language.

He is saying he walked with integrity before the LORD. Even when he was falsely accused or unjustly pursued by his enemies, he kept covenant faithfulness with Yahweh. Ultimately, David contrasts his obedience to God with the rebellion of his enemies. God vindicated him because he remained faithful to God and His ways. In David's limited understanding how righteousness worked in his life. This was not an incorrect way for him to understand it, but it was limited.

However, is this the best way for us to understand righteousness in vv. 20-30? Are we supposed to compare our obedience to God to our enemies' disobedience and then declare that we are righteous? No, we are not.

So, the best way to understand vv. 20-24 is Christologically. Christologically means in light of the person of Christ and His divine nature, sinless character, and His atoning work on our behalf. Bottom line: No mere human can sing or claim vv. 20-24 except in the sense that he can look forward to the person and work of Christ on his behalf. Jesus is your covenant faithfulness.

Ultimately, the only way David could apply these verses to himself was by looking forward to the Messiah and trusting in the One who could truly say:

The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God.

Then vv. 22-23 point to the One who lived a completely holy and blameless life:

For all his rules were before me, and his statutes I did not put away from me.²³ I was blameless before him, and I kept myself from my guilt.

Finally, v. 24 concludes this amazing declaration of personal righteousness:

So the LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight.

The words in vv. 20-24 can only apply to the One who “*did not know sin*” (2 Corinthians 5:21). These verses are a portrait of Jesus Christ and the righteousness He would provide for His people in the future. By faith, David was given Jesus’ righteousness that he would earn.

Verses 25-30 describe the character and actions of the God who is perfect in all His ways. In these verses, we see that the LORD is *merciful* toward the *merciful*. He is *blameless* to the *blameless*. He is *pure* to the *purified*. He punishes the *crooked*. He saves the *humble*. He is our *light* in the *darkness*. He gives *strength* to His people.

The last three lines of v. 30 sum up our passage. Look at what it says: God’s ways are *perfect (blameless)*. They are evidenced by the *flawless word of God, which proves true*. Here’s the deal: *The flawless, perfect word of God is proved true because God kept the promises He made in Psalm 2. He kept His promise to King David, and to Christ as the fulfillment of Psalm 2. Now through Christ God keeps His promise to us, His people.*¹

When we understand the Christological nature of these verses, we see that Jesus is the source of our righteousness, just as He was the source of King David’s righteousness. The bottom line is: When people trust in Jesus, what is true of Him becomes true of us. His righteousness becomes our righteousness. His holiness becomes our holiness.

David teaches us that these verses give Christ credit for every victory we experience in life. When we are obedient to God, it is Christ working in us by His Spirit to produce holiness. It is Christ who equips us for battle and gives us strength to fight sin. These verses teach us that our obedience to God is a grace-driven effort. We can never take credit for our obedience, but praise God who has worked in us by His Holy Spirit.

Finally, we must remember and believe that by faith our faithfulness to God is never wasted. Even when it feels like our obedience to Jesus is costing us everything, we must remember that God sees, He remembers, and He will reward those who seek diligently to walk in His ways.

Here’s the bottom line again: When we trust in Jesus, what is true of Him becomes true of us. His righteousness becomes our righteousness. His holiness becomes our holiness. He is the source of the righteousness that we strive to live out on a daily basis.

IV. The source of our victory is Christ (vv. 31-45)

In vv. 31-45, we see how God equipped David for the battles he faced. However, I want you to notice how David cooperated with God’s gracious equipping. God prepared David and gave him the victory, but David was careful not to take credit for it. Let’s read vv. 31-45 and notice how David understood how God’s grace worked the victory in his life.

First, look in vv. 31-36, to see how God equipped David for the battle:

*For who is God, but the LORD?
And who is a rock, except our God?—
³² the God who equipped me with strength*

¹ Christopher Ash, *The Psalms a Christ-center Commentary*, Vol. 2, 202.

and made my way blameless².
³³ *He made my feet like the feet of a deer*
and set me secure on the heights.
³⁴ *He trains my hands for war,*
so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.
³⁵ *You have given me the shield of your salvation,*
and your right hand supported me,
and your gentleness made me great.
³⁶ *You gave a wide place for my steps under me,*
and my feet did not slip.

Here, David is careful to give God the credit for his ability to carry out what God had called him to do – fight the battle.

Then in the last section, vv. 37-45, the language of the song bounces back and forth between God's sovereign gift of victory and David's responsibility to be obedient to what God had called him to do. Listen to vv. 37-45, in these verses, David tells us what he did, and yet it was God who gave the victory:

I pursued my enemies and overtook them,
and did not turn back till they were consumed.
³⁸ *I thrust them through, so that they were not able to rise;*
they fell under my feet.
³⁹ *For you equipped me with strength for the battle;*
you made those who rise against me sink under me.
⁴⁰ *You made my enemies turn their backs to me,*
and those who hated me I destroyed.
⁴¹ *They cried for help, but there was none to save;*
they cried to the LORD, but he did not answer them.
⁴² *I beat them fine as dust before the wind;*
I cast them out like the mire of the streets.
⁴³ *You delivered me from strife with the people;*
you made me the head of the nations;
people whom I had not known served me.
⁴⁴ *As soon as they heard of me they obeyed me;*
foreigners came cringing to me.
⁴⁵ *Foreigners lost heart*
and came trembling out of their fortresses.

So, here we have David's experience of being equipped for battle by the LORD and then the LORD giving him victory.

David's experience in these verses is a wonderful description of our Lord Jesus, too. Jesus came as our Warrior to fight spiritual battles against Satan and this fallen world. The demons and Jesus' enemies could not refute his wisdom and stand before Him. He ultimately completed His conquest and victory by His obedience to God; He died as our substitute on the cross.

So, if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, God has given you spiritual weapons through the person and work of Christ. Now, through this equipping, Jesus fights our battles for us. Ephesians 6:12-18 tells us:

² Just a side note: In v. 32, we now understand how David understands where his righteousness came from in his life. God gave it to him.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

Here we learn that God equips His saints for the battle. The question is: Are you wearing the armor of God? Is His truth your belt? Are your vitals covered with the breastplate of His righteousness? Do you have the spiritual agility of a deer because your feet are equipped with the gospel of peace? Are you holding fast to your shield of faith? When life is difficult and temptation is strong, do you begin to doubt God's goodness? What is it you need to do? You need to lift up your shield of faith and remind yourself of what you believe. You need to remember that Jesus is the source of your victory and not your own strength, power, or ability. *God equips you, but Jesus is the source of your victory.*

V. The source of our worship is Christ (vv. 46-50)

Psalm 18 closes with pure doxology. David exalts God for what He has done for him. As he comes to the end of his song, his heart overflows with praise. Listen to v. 46:

*The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock,
and exalted be the God of my salvation—*

Then in vv. 47-48, David looks back on how Yahweh vindicated him in the face of his enemies:

*The God who gave me vengeance
and subdued peoples under me,
⁴⁸ who rescued me from my enemies;
yes, you exalted me above those who rose against me;
you delivered me from the man of violence.*

Then in v. 49, David looks forward and sees the nations praising God with Him. This has a Messianic tone, as we know that Jesus is the One who brought the nations into the family of God through His life, death, and resurrection from the dead. Look at v. 49:

*For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations,
and sing to your name.*

Finally, look at v. 50. This verse clearly looks into the future as he sees the Messiah who will come. David says:

*Great salvation he (Yahweh) brings to his king,
and shows steadfast love to his anointed,
to David and his offspring forever.*

Verse 50 points forward to the coming of Christ, for Jesus is the "Offspring Forever." Jesus is the ultimate King of God's people.

Friends, Psalm 18 begins with danger and ends with doxology. It starts in the depths of distress and culminates in the heights of worship.

Brothers and sisters, God's glory and strength are an eternal well-spring that overflows for us to enjoy and find refreshment as we travel through this life. It is our source of strength. We don't stand at the bottom of the

mountain with a bucket and fill it from the stream and then climb the mountain and put it into the stream and say, *"There! Look what I did for God."* That's not the way it works. Instead, we stand at the bottom of the mountain, get on our knees, and immerse our faces in the stream of God's goodness and glory; in other words, we worship Him. We deeply drink from the stream of God's glory and strength because He is the well-spring.

So, when life collapses, the question is: Will you drink deeply from your hope, Jesus? When the enemy surrounds you, will Jesus be the source of your rescue? As you strive to live in obedience to God, is Jesus the source stream of your righteousness? Friends, when your strength fails, go to the wellspring of Christ and find the source of your victory.