

Lessons in Trust

Psalm 20

Michael Felkins

Grand Avenue Baptist Church

Ames, Iowa

November 16, 2025

When I was growing up in Mississippi with my mom and stepdad, this was before I moved to Texas to live with my dad; we had a family farm. We lived out in the country and had an old Ford-Ferguson tractor. When it was time to begin planting, the people on our little country road would call us to plow their garden plots. My stepdad and I would drive the tractor down to their place, and he would plow their garden plot. As I got older, my stepdad taught me how to do the plowing. The key, he said, was to look across the field, find a fixed point, and keep your eye on it as you drive the tractor. If you look to the left or right, the tractor will drift in that direction, and the row will be crooked. The principle is that the tractor will always drift in the direction your eyes are looking.

This principle is not only true for plowing a garden, mowing a yard, or driving a car, but it is also true in life. The truth is, our hearts always tend to drift toward where our eyes are focused. If your eyes continually look at the troubles that surround you or at the distractions that are around you, your heart will follow. This is why we need Psalm 20. Psalm 20 teaches us to fix our eyes on Jesus and trust Him in *times of trouble*.

Every believer will face what David calls “*the day of trouble*.” It might come as a sudden, serious health diagnosis like cancer, a death in the family, some kind of family crisis, a financial hardship, or spiritual opposition. We are often prepared for the good days — but it’s the day of trouble that reveals where our faith truly lies, or we might say, “*Where our eyes are focused*.”

So, before we dig into Psalm 20, I want to give you a brief overview. As we have been journeying through the Psalms, one of the things I want to help you understand is that each Psalm is placed where it is in the Psalter by divine design. Each Psalm is connected to the next. Now, this doesn’t mean you can’t simply turn to a Psalm, read it, meditate on it, and pray and benefit from it. You absolutely can do that, and I encourage that. However, there is a connectedness in the Psalms that we need to understand, and when we do, we can begin to grasp the poetic redemptive narrative they teach.

The case in point is Psalm 20 and Psalm 21. These two Psalms belong together as a pair of royal Psalms. There is no doubt that is why they are placed next to each other in the Psalter. Most likely, King David composed them as companion Psalms. For example, Psalm 20:9 prays, “*O LORD, save the king*,” while Psalm 21:1 celebrates by saying, “*In your salvation how greatly [the king] exults!*” In Psalm 20:4, King David writes, “*May he [the LORD] grant your heart’s desire*.” Then Psalm 21:2 says, “*You have given him his heart’s desire*.” Finally, in Psalm 20, we hear the people make their prayer request to God, and Psalm 21 gives thanks to God for answering the request.

Psalm 20 is a prayer made by the people of Israel for King David, as he prepared to go to war. They prayed that God would give him victory, not because of his army, but because of his God. So, Psalm 20 is a royal Psalm, but it is also a battle Psalm. A Psalm of warfare.

Psalm 20 teaches us how to face life’s battles with faith. It calls us not to trust in our resources but to trust in the name of the Lord our God. It teaches us how to fix our eyes on Jesus in the day of trouble.

Psalm 20 has three sections. Verses 1-5 are the prayer of God’s people for David, their King. The people prayed that his faith would not fail. Then vv. 6-8, we hear a confession of confidence in the LORD in the day of trouble. Finally, v. 9 closes Psalm 20 by returning to the exhortation to call on the name of the LORD in the day of trouble.

Of those three sections, I have four application points to guide us through Psalm 20. We are going to see how Psalm 20 teaches us “*Lessons in Trusting God*.” How do we trust God in the day of trouble?

I. Pray a prayer of trust (vv. 1-5)

The first lesson is to pray a prayer of trust in God. Now, this sounds simple and like a no-brainer, but what often happens is that when the day of trouble hits our lives, the first thing we don't do is pray. Often, we begin to work out our own plans before we stop and pray. The first five verses of Psalm 20 teach us to press pause on our planning and go to the Lord in prayer before the battle begins.

As we work through the verses, I want you to notice how many times the second-personal pronoun "you" is used. In the ESV, it is used ten times. Your translation may have one more or one less. Paying attention to these pronouns is important as Psalm 20 unfolds.

So, let's see what King David has to teach us about a prayer of trust in the first five verses. Look in v. 1:

"May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble! May the name of the God of Jacob defend you."

Psalm 20 opens with the people praying for their King. It opens not with the people focusing on *the day of trouble* but with *a prayer of trust*. So, before the battle begins, God's people pray a prayer for trust in the LORD on behalf of their King.

They understand that the army is ready, the weapons are plentiful, the horses and chariots are filled with soldiers — but before they go to war, they know the most important thing they can do is call on the name of the LORD. They must pray prayers of trust in the LORD.

In v. 1b, they pray a prayer of protection for their king:

"May the name of the God of Jacob defend you."

In the first part of v. 1, they call on God's covenant name — Yahweh. However, here they expand on God's covenant name and call Him *"the God of Jacob."* Remember, it was Yahweh who took Jacob, the deceiver, and transformed his life and renamed him Israel — *"a prince who prevailed with God."*

What we learn from this is that when trouble comes, we do not cry to some impersonal deity. We call upon the personal, covenant-keeping God who has redeemed us by His grace, and His name is Jesus. Jesus endured *the day of trouble* on the cross to secure for His people grace to help them in their *day of trouble*.

I want you to notice one more thing about this verse. The Hebrew word *"protect"* suggests being seated in a secure place out of the enemy's reach. So, what does this mean for us when we pray a prayer of trust? It means that Jesus is our covenant head, seated at the right hand of the Father. He is in that secure place, and He mediates for us there. Nothing will thwart His prayers for those who trust in Him. So, if you're concerned that you are not good at praying, that's okay. You need to know that Jesus prays for you when you don't know what or how to pray. Simply trust in Him.

However, keep this in mind, His mediation for us doesn't mean we will not go through *the day of trouble*. It doesn't mean we won't suffer, be tempted to sin, or struggle at times. It does mean that when we call on the name of the LORD in the day of trouble, He hears our prayers and will help us.

Next, the people pray a prayer for Yahweh's strength to be given to David in the form of the LORD's presence. Look in v. 2:

"May He send you help from the sanctuary, and strengthen you out of Zion."

The people understood that true help comes not from human sources but from the presence of God Himself. The *"sanctuary"* was where God dwelt. It was the place where God made His presence, power, and mercy known to His people. The Psalms often refer to help coming to God's people from His sanctuary. This means God would make His holy presence known in their lives in order to strengthen them in the day of trouble.

Now, listen to me, we must be careful not to read too much into this text. Here's what I mean. God's presence does dwell in His sanctuary, but because He is omnipresent and omnipotent, this means that all of God dwells at every point in His universe in His fullness. So, God is not simply hanging out in His sanctuary waiting. No, He is everywhere at all times with complete power to save. It's not like your prayer sounds the fire alarm and God

has to slide down the fire pole, get in the truck, and make it to your location. God is already there when we call upon His name.

We must not limit God's presence to one location – the *sanctuary*. God is bigger than that. So, if you limit God to only one place at one point in time, then you are not thinking about the God of the Bible, and this means your god is too small and will not be able to help you in *the day of trouble*.

Next, listen to what they prayed in v. 3,

"May He remember all your offerings."

Before David went to war, he offered sacrifices to seek God's favor. Worship came before warfare. Worship should always come before warfare in our lives. Worship is actually where we find the Lord's strength to fight our battles.

This past Friday evening, we had an evening of prayer and worship, but it was also an evening of spiritual warfare. I came into the service with a heavy heart, and my heaviness didn't go away just because I showed up. It did, however, prepare me to fight the battles in my heart and mind later that evening. Worship always comes before warfare, and in many ways, worship is warfare.

Friends, before you step into the battle, bow before the LORD. Before you face your problem, seek His presence. Strength for the fight is found in communion with Almighty God.

Finally, in vv. 4-5, we see the prayer for victory and, by faith, rejoicing in that victory. First, look in v. 4:

"May He grant you according to your heart's desire, and fulfill all your purpose."

This prayer isn't a blank check kind of prayer to have your selfish ambition fulfilled. David was a man after God's own heart, so his desires were aligned with God's purposes. The people were praying,

"Lord, bless the plans that honor You."

Then they declare,

"We will rejoice in Your salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners!"

The word "*banners*" refers to the flags soldiers raised in victory. What this means is that even before the battle began, they were singing the victory songs! Listen, a prayer of trust celebrates the victory before the battle is even fought. It is like the Israelites marching around Jericho, and a victory shout brought the walls down. This is what faith is. Faith is our spiritual eyes; even when our physical eyes cannot see the victory – faith sees the victory.

Do you remember what Hebrews 11:1 says:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Genuine trust in the Lord rejoices before the answer comes. If you trust the Lord, you can rejoice and thank Him in advance for what He will do. This is how we pray prayers of trust in the day of trouble.

II. Confess your confidence in Christ (v. 6)

In vv. 1-5, we hear the people pray a prayer of trust for the King. They want him to succeed because he trusts in the LORD and not his own ability, strength, resources, or cleverness.

I want you to notice the change in the pronoun in v. 6. We had ten uses of the pronoun "*you*" in vv. 1-5, but now we see the pronoun change from second-person singular to first-person singular. The people had been praying for David, and now David responds with a confession of confidence in the LORD. Look at v. 6:

Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand.

In v. 6, we hear David's voice. He responds to the prayers his people have prayed for him with a firm confession of confidence that the LORD will save him. The prayers of the people have been answered, for the King responds with confidence, not in himself but in His God.

This is the second lesson in trust. If we pray for the ability to trust, then we should respond with confidence in our God. The eyes of faith help us to have confidence in our God, even when we do not know what will happen in the day of trouble.

Next, I want you to notice the Hebrew word for "*anointed*." It means Messiah or Christ. At this point, in Psalm 20, King David puts on his prophetic hat as he wrote. What I mean by this is that by faith, he saw the day when God would save the Christ. The question is: Did he understand the details of the Messiah's life? Did he know when he would leave Heaven and come to earth? Did he know what His name would be? The answer is: No, he didn't know any of these things. But he did believe that God would raise up one of his descendants to be the Messiah and sit on His throne. He knew this future King would suffer and that God would rescue Him. So, he prayed for the future greater Son who would come. He trusted in God's Greater Son.¹

We know the name of the Son. His name is Jesus of Nazareth. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, but God raised Him from the dead as King and Lord. The New Testament gives us the complete picture of His life when He died on the cross to pay for our sins. Jesus calls us to turn from our sin and trust in Him as the Messiah. Do you trust Him? Have you confessed your confidence in the LORD's Christ? You need to believe in Him today. He is calling you to trust in Him.

III. Know what trust is and isn't (vv. 7-8)

The prayer continues in these two verses (vv. 7-8), and the pronoun changes again. This time from *first person singular* to *first person plural*. This signals to us that the people and King David confessed their trust in the Lord corporately as a covenant community. Look at vv. 7-8:

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. ⁸ They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright.

Verses 7-8 give us a poetic description of what trust looks like. The Hebrew word for "*trust*" essentially means to "*boast*". It's the same word the Apostle Paul uses in Galatians 6:14,

But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

What we learn is that boasting is a form of trust. It is a confession of confidence in a thing or a person.

King David was saying that some people boast in their chariots for victory and some in their horses for victory, but we boast in the name of the LORD our God. What we need to understand is how easy it would have been for the people to trust in their military resources. After all, the horse and chariot were equivalent to the nuclear weapon of the day, and King David had many, and he had been successful with them.

Listen, it was good that they had those resources. The LORD had given them to the King. However, he and his people needed to be careful because when a good thing becomes an ultimate thing, then you have an idol and therefore misplaced trust.

Here's the beautiful thing about this moment and their corporate confession of faith. *The people did nothing but confess their trust in the LORD. They did nothing but trust, and yet, they gained everything.*

Every time we read a psalm about the King, we need to remember how it points us beyond King David. David was the anointed king of Psalm 20, but it points our eyes beyond King David to King Jesus. Jesus is the ultimate anointed King, and Psalm 20 was written to point us to that King.

¹ James A. Johnston, *Preaching the Word: Psalms 1-41*, Vol. 1, 221.

Jesus is the one who went to battle and won that victory, while we did nothing. He was the victorious one who defeated all our enemies through his life, death, and resurrection. Our sins were buried with Him, and we have new life because of His resurrection. We are seated with him in the heavenly places, not because of our victory but because of His (Ephesians 2:6). All we do is trust Him, and when we trust in Him – we gain everything.

Brothers and sisters, Psalm 20 reminds us to continually redirect our eyes to Jesus in times of trouble. First, in troubled times, we must keep looking to Jesus, or our hearts will drift toward where our eyes are focused.

Second, in troubled times, we must continually remind ourselves of Jesus' victory on our behalf. When you struggle with doubt and anxiety in the day of trouble, take v. 6 and begin to pray it out loud,

"Now, I know that the LORD saves his anointed."

If you are like me, your eyes get focused on the wrong things, and you forget that Jesus has won the victory. Verse 6 reminds us that Jesus has won, and therefore we can rest in His victory in the day of trouble.

Third, in troubled times, we must *rise and stand upright*. The posture of our minds, hearts, and mouths says a lot about our faith. Our troubles tend to cripple us, leaving us defeated, scared, discouraged, or even paralyzed with fear and anxiety. Instead, we must rise and stand firm.²

So, here is the question. What are the chariots and horses that you trust in today? Is it your retirement account? Your savings? Your education? Your real estate holdings or financial portfolio? Perhaps you have made your family your safety net. The bottom line is this: We must trust in the "*name*" of the Lord our God. The "*name*" represents His character — His faithfulness, mercy, power, and covenant love. When you remember His name, you remember what He has done to save you.

According to v. 8, there are only two outcomes with these two kinds of trust. Those who trust in themselves stumble and fall to their utter ruin. But those who boast in the LORD will stand firm.

Verse 8 sounds like what Jesus said at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said:

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

²⁷ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

The question is: What foundation is your life built on? The unstable sand or the Rock of Christ? What will happen to your life when the day of trouble comes? On whom or what are you relying? If the answer is any other than Jesus, then your life will collapse in the end, and great will be its fall.

IV. Keep calling on the name of the Lord (v. 9)

Verse 9 ends where we began, with the charge to call on the name of the Lord. This exhortation to call on the name of the LORD brackets Psalm 20 and drives home the point of the importance of our need for the LORD.

The implication of this exhortation also implies our weakness, our forgetfulness, and neglect to call on the name of the LORD when times of trouble come into our lives. Often, we remember to complain to the LORD but not call on Him in trust.

Now, don't hear what I'm not saying. Listen, it is perfectly acceptable to complain to the LORD. As a matter of fact, the Psalms encourage us to do that. That is what a lament is, but we must remember that even laments and complaints to the LORD conclude in trust that the LORD knows what He is doing; therefore, we must trust Him in the day of trouble by calling on Him to help us.

² Josh Smith and Daniel Akin, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Psalms 1-50* You may, 149-150.

Conclusion: Let me close with this final application. Remember, we are learning to apply these lessons of trusting Jesus to our lives. We are preparing for warfare by worshiping Jesus. Verses 7-9 teach us that one key to keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus as we go through the day of trouble is corporate worship.

Remember how the pronouns progressed in Psalm 20. It went from second-person singular (you) to first-person singular (I), and finally to first-person plural (we). These last three verses (vv. 7-9) picture the church in worship, preparing for warfare so that we do not drift to the left or the right in life. Corporate worship helps us train our eyes on Jesus every Sunday. Corporate worship trains us for spiritual warfare.

So, think about it this way: If you get up each Sunday and you ask yourself, “*Am I going to church today?*” You don’t really understand what corporate worship is for. Corporate worship is not about getting on God’s good side at the start of your week. Corporate worship is not about keeping God happy because you attended 3 out of 4 Sundays this month. Corporate worship is not about getting the warm fuzzies at the beginning of the week.

Corporate worship is designed to remind you that everything in life will fail you, so you need to place your trust in Jesus. Corporate worship is spiritual warfare that trains your heart and mind for the battle for the week ahead. It reminds you that Jesus won the victory when He conquered death by rising from the dead, and now by trusting in Him, we live in that victory.

So, to prepare us to trust the LORD this week, I want you to take your Service Guide and turn to page 8. Let’s read vv. 7-9 together so that our worship becomes our spiritual warfare:

*Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.*

⁸ *They collapse and fall,
but we rise and stand upright.*

⁹ *O LORD, save the king!
May he answer us when we call.*

Friends, I’ve got good news for you. The LORD has already saved the King, for when Jesus rose from the dead, the victory was won, and the King whom we worship was saved. Now, with confidence, we can confess our trust in the King, for when we call on Him, He will answer, for it is the King who mediates our prayers to the LORD.