



The God of compassion and mercy

Sermon for January 9 2022

Psalm 86

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Sermon Introduction

The leaders of this church have decided to study the New City Catechism this year because it is an excellent summary of the most-important Christian truths. One Voice Fellowship is a church of different people who are united by the same Savior. It's important that we have the same mind about what we believe.

"Catechism" comes from a Greek word katacheo, which means "to teach." There are 52 questions and answers in the New City Catechism. We have provided you with copies of all 52 in your own heart language. They are also posted in the resources section of our website. Today we are on Question 2. I will read the question, and then let's read the answer together.

Question 2: What is God?

God is the creator and sustainer of everyone and everything. He is eternal, infinite, and unchangeable in his power and perfection, goodness and glory, wisdom, justice, and truth. Nothing happens except through him and his will.

Now let's look at today's passage of scripture.

Psalm 86 A prayer of David.

- 1 Bend down, O Lord, and hear my prayer; answer me, for I need your help.
- 2 Protect me, for I am devoted to you. Save me, for I serve you and trust you. You are my God.
- 3 Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I am calling on you constantly.
- 4 Give me happiness, O Lord, for I give myself to you.
- 5 O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help.
- 6 Listen closely to my prayer, O Lord; hear my urgent cry.
- 7 I will call to you whenever I'm in trouble, and you will answer me.
- 8 No pagan god is like you, O Lord. None can do what you do!
- 9 All the nations you made will come and bow before you, Lord; they will praise your holy name.
- 10 For you are great and perform wonderful deeds. You alone are God.
- 11 Teach me your ways, O Lord, that I may live according to your truth! Grant me purity of heart, so that I may honor you.
- 12 With all my heart I will praise you, O Lord my God. I will give glory to your name forever,
- 13 for your love for me is very great. You have rescued me from the depths of death.
- 14 O God, insolent people rise up against me; a violent gang is trying to kill me. You mean nothing to them.
- 15 But you, O Lord, are a God of compassion and mercy, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.
- 16 Look down and have mercy on me. Give your strength to your servant; save me, the son of your servant.
- 17 Send me a sign of your favor. Then those who hate me will be put to shame, for you, O Lord, help and comfort me.

Together we read Isaiah 40:8:

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

Let's pray together.

Father, we want to know you in a way that changes us. We want to see you as you are, so we can glorify you in all we do. This is not something we can do by ourselves. Please send the Holy Spirit to us now, to renew our minds and transform our hearts. We ask this in the name of Jesus our Lord and Savior.

Amen.

Here are the three points for today's message:

Point 1. Where do you go with problems?

Point 2. Five reasons you should pray.

Point 3. We pray to the God of compassion and mercy.

Point 1. Where do you go with problems?

Most of the things we do each day we can do without help. Isn't that true? Even you children can make your own breakfast, choose your clothes, do your chores. Adults can get to work, go shopping, and do many things without any help from anyone. But when we have a problem that we don't know how to solve, where do we go? I was installing a switch for the fan in our bathroom on Monday. I got confused about where the wires should go. I was frustrated that I couldn't solve the problem. So what did I do? I went to the internet for help, because there are many answers online. But praying was not my first idea. Sometimes, I don't go to God first with a problem. How about you?

David is a good example to us, to help us know how to pray. God uses prayers like Psalm 86 to teach us to pray in all circumstances and with all our problems, even electrical wiring! When we look at verses 1-5, we see David asking God for some very specific things.

Verse 1: "Bend down, O Lord, and hear my prayer; answer me, for I need your help."

David asks God to "bend down" in verse 1, and to hear his prayer. God is holy and David is not. God is perfect and David is not. That's why David asks God to come down to David's level. Like when you kneel to talk with a small child. You don't ask the child to get taller! You come down to the child's level, to hear the child's voice. David asks God to answer because he needs help.

Then in verses 2-4 David asks God to do four things, and he gives four reasons.

2 "Protect me, for I am devoted to you. Save me, for I serve you and trust you. You are my God.

3 Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I am calling on you constantly.

4 Give me happiness, O Lord, for I give myself to you."

Do you see the four specific things David ask God to do?

"Protect me.

Save me.

Be merciful to me.

Give me happiness."

These are requests of someone who is scared, lost, helpless, and depressed.

Do you ever feel those things?

Where do you go for help?

With each of the four requests, David gives a reason why he is asking for help.

David says "I am devoted to you.

I serve you and trust you.

You are my God.

I am calling on you constantly.

I give myself to you."

What connects all these reasons that David mentions?

Two words: I and you.

You and I.

David's reason for praying is relationship.

False gods and idols are not personal.

They are not persons.

You can't have a relationship with a statue of Buddha.

Only Christians worship the one living God and call Him our Father.

Jesus teaches this about prayer in Matthew 7:9-11.

9 "You parents, if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead?

10 Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not!

11 So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him."

Jesus is saying that our heavenly Father answers the prayers of his children. He is a good Father, who gives us what we need because of the loving relationship we have in him. God does not say yes to our prayers because of our character. His blessings flow from His character.

Catechism Question 2 asks, "What is God?"

We do not decide who God is. God made us in His image. We cannot make him in our image or imagination. We learn who God is by reading God's Word. We study Psalm 86 today because it reveals to us many truths about God's character.

Look with me at verse 5, please.

5 "O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help."

In verse 5 David says that God is "so good." God is not only "good." He is "so good" or "very good." And the Lord is "so full of unfailing love." Do you find it hard to believe that God is "so good" and "so full of unfailing love"? When we are honest about our lives, we know that we do a lot of things wrong. We know we have sin in our hearts. This makes us believe that no one can really love us.

But, in verse 5 David also reminds us that the Lord is "so ready to forgive." If you want to feel confident that God loves you, look at the cross. Remember the price that was paid for your forgiveness. God cannot just forget about sin. He cannot pretend we are innocent. Our sin is a moral debt, and someone has to pay that debt.

Jesus absorbed the debt of our sin into his body on the cross, so that we could be debt-free. Jesus was punished like a guilty person. We are loved like innocent people, however, if we trust in Christ's sacrifice for us. As verse 5 says, God is "so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help." When you ask him for help with your sin problem, you see in the cross the unfailing love of the Father, who is so ready to forgive.

Then, with confidence in his love for you, you will be ready to pray.

Let's look at point 2.

Point 2. Five reasons you should pray.

In verse 6 and 7 David says:

6 "Listen closely to my prayer, O Lord; hear my urgent cry.

7 I will call to you whenever I'm in trouble, and you will answer me."

David asks the Lord to listen closely, because his cry is urgent. His prayer is a "cry" for help. We don't know what David's problem was when he wrote this Psalm. We can see in verse 7 that he was in trouble. But David knows here to go with big problems. David says in verse 7 that he will call to the Lord because "you will answer me." A lot of people had their flights cancelled in the past two weeks because of Covid and bad weather. Calling the airline was not much help, because no one would answer your call. People had to wait for 2 or 3 hours before someone at the airline answered their phone call.

Our God is not like that.

In John 6:68–69, we read this:

68 "Simon Peter replied, 'Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life.

69 We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God.'"

"To whom would we go" in time of trouble?

To someone who will answer. When you call to the Lord, in the name of Jesus, He will answer you. That's one very good reason to pray when you are in trouble. In the next six verses, David gives us four more reasons to pray to the Lord.

Let's look at those reasons together.

In verse 8, David gives us a spiritual reason.

8 "No pagan god is like you, O Lord. None can do what you do!"

A lot of false gods have been invented by human minds. Different cultures in history have invented false gods for different purposes. They pray to one idol, asking for rain. When there is too much rain, they ask a different idol to make the rain stop. But praying to a god that isn't real is like calling a phone number that's disconnected. No one will answer!

Moses and Elijah were two witnesses of this in the Old Testament. They proved to idol worshippers the power of the only true and living God in the world.

Next, in verse 9 gives us a global reason to pray:

9 "All the nations you made will come and bow before you, Lord; they will praise your holy name."

One of the blessings of being at One Voice Fellowship is seeing verses like this come to life. David was praying for the day when people of every language, tribe, and ethnicity would come and worship the one true God together. Wherever you are from, you can pray to the King of kings, because he is not the God of Israel. He is not the God of America or Europe, or God of the white man. He is Lord and Savior and Father of anyone in any place who will repent of their sin and trust in Jesus.

Verse 10 provides another reason to pray, a historical reason:

10 "For you are great and perform wonderful deeds. You alone are God."

Many of the psalms list the deeds of the Lord in history. I'm sure David was thinking of specific things that he was thankful for. How about you?

Let's pause for just a few seconds, so we can all think for a moment. Can you remember one or two wonderful deeds that God has done? Take a moment to think.

When I am tempted by doubt and disbelief, I remember some specific things that God has done. Things that only He could do. Remembering gives me confidence to continue praying to Him in difficult situations. Because He alone is God. He alone is great and performs wonderful deeds.

The fifth reason David gives us to pray is personal.

This God of the nations, who has done amazing things throughout history, is also a very personal God.

Look with me at verses 11 to 13.

11 "Teach me your ways, O Lord, that I may live according to your truth! Grant me purity of heart, so that I may honor you.

12 With all my heart I will praise you, O Lord my God. I will give glory to your name forever,

13 for your love for me is very great. You have rescued me from the depths of death."

David asks for two specific personal blessings in verse 11. He wants God to teach him the ways of the Lord. And David asks for a pure heart. The blessings David prays for have a purpose. Both of his requests in verse 11 are focused on growing in relationship with God. David wants to bring God glory with his life, but he needs the Lord's blessing to do this.

When you pray, are you trying to change God's mind? Often when we pray, we are trying to persuade God to do something, to change his mind about a situation. But wise prayers ask God to change us. Godly prayers say to God, "I might be wrong about this. I don't understand what is happening. Please give me your eyes, and your heart." Let's pray in 2022 that the Lord teaches all of us His ways, so we may live according to His truth.

Point 3. We pray to the God of compassion and mercy.

Let's finish now by looking at Verse 15 together:

15 "But you, O Lord, are a God of compassion and mercy, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness."

My friends, we pray to the "God of compassion and mercy." Compassion is a feeling, and mercy is an action. God's compassion for us moves him to action. Do you remember what God told Moses from the burning bush?

Exodus 3:7-8.

7 "The LORD said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.

8 So I have come down to rescue them!"

God saw the suffering of his people. He heard them crying out, and God's heart was moved with compassion. Therefore, verse 8 says, "I have come down to rescue them." That's mercy. Undeserved rescue from a situation too great for us. We all have a burden and debt of sin that is too great for us. But we have seen in this psalm that there is someone with the character and power to help us.

Verse 5 says: "O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help."

The Lord is ready to forgive your sins, my friend. He is "so full of unfailing love for all who ask for help." God the Father will say yes when you ask for forgiveness, because he said no to His own Son. On the night before he died, Jesus asked the Father if there was another way. Jesus asked God for a different plan so he could avoid going to the cross. But then Jesus prayed for his mind to change to match the Father's mind. Jesus surrendered to the Father's will.

Listen to what the prophet Isaiah said about Jesus, in Isaiah 53:9-10.

9 "He had done no wrong and had never deceived anyone. But he was buried like a criminal; he was put in a rich man's grave.

10 But it was the Lord's good plan to crush him and cause him grief. Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have many descendants."

It was God's good plan to crush Jesus and cause him grief. The death of Jesus on the cross was God's good plan. How could that be good? Because his life was made an offering for sin. God crushed Jesus so that you and I can pray to him in times of trouble. Through Christ's sacrifice he gained many descendants, including you and me. Jesus died to bless us with the kind of relationship David describes here. That is why we can pray with confidence and hope in the God who reveals himself to us in Psalm 86. Who is God, my friends? He is the "God of compassion and mercy!"

Let's pray together to Him now.

Jesus, thank you for allowing our debt of sin to be poured on you. You did not deserve to die a criminal's death. And we do not deserve to be called the sons and daughters of God. But that is what we are! Father, we know your unfailing love, because we have seen you are so ready to forgive. Help us live with hope, joy, and confidence that you will answer our prayers, for our good and your glory. We pray in the name of Jesus.

Amen.