

Here we are friends. According to the calendar, it's September. That one word can trigger a lot of thoughts and emotions. September means start up. The start of the school year; the Fall Season and society collectively getting back to work full time. September also means harvest for farmers and gardeners. It means the scramble has begun to get construction projects done before the winter. September also brings the startup of many sports leagues and teams. For some of you retired folks, September is your opportunity to enjoy some vacation free from all those annoying families and kids that travel during the summer. September can be a very exciting time.

But it can also hit us like a wave. All those challenges we put on the back burner now face us. Maybe at work your business is not going well or there's a multitude of things to do that keep piling up. Maybe you're not sure about your career direction or possibilities and thinking about a career change overwhelms you. Maybe it looks like your job will require more work from you with less resources. Or you know that post Labor Day, everything ramps up at work. You may be retired and continually wonder if you will have enough income to see you through or enough purpose to keep going. Or you've been dealing with under employment and you wonder when you will ever get steady work.

Maybe you have house or appliance or car problems. And the last thing you need right now is a big repair bill. Or you haven't been able to sell your home or find a home or get a renter. Maybe you have issues with your parents or there's some family dynamic at home that threatens to overwhelm your life. Or you're going to be at home with little ones and you wonder if you will be able to handle the responsibility of caring for them all.

Then there's school. Will you find your way around the new campus? Will you be able to get all the course work done? Will you be able to adjust to this new teacher or class or school? How will you handle this new group of students?

Or maybe you face health issues. You or your loved one have a serious health concern. You wonder what the future holds. You wonder if you or your loved one will come through this illness.

What do we do when life threatens to overwhelm us? Well today I want to provide you with something that can help greatly. It's something that can address any of the situations I've described. What is it? Simply, **When life threatens to overwhelm you, pray.**

This Fall, we're going to focus on prayer in the Sunday morning messages. These messages come out of my own journey with prayer over the last 2 years. In 2014, I declared to God and to myself that I was tremendously dissatisfied with the state of my prayer life. It needed to change. My prayers had become stale and routine. My walk with God was not where it needed to be. So I resolved to go deeper with the Lord in prayer. This resulted in some months of reading about prayer and then a year long journey to strengthen the practice of prayer in my own life and deepen my connection with the Lord. It has not been easy. Yet it has been rewarding. But it continues and I will share some of my discoveries. But we will also learn much about the necessity of prayer and ways to do it throughout our days. Today, I want to show you one of the many ways we can connect with God through prayer shown to us in the Psalms.

I've called it a prayer for the Fall or for overwhelming seasons in life. This might be exactly what you need now in your life. Or you might not need it now. But it is something you will need the next time life threatens to overwhelm you. I pray that this will encourage you and show a way that you can follow to connect with God during overwhelming times. So please find Psalm 69 in your Bibles. It's on page 421 in the Bibles in front of you. We're going to read it in chunks as we work our way through the Psalm starting in verses 1-5.

Psalm 69 (ESV)

69 Save me, O God!

For the waters have come up to my neck.

² I sink in deep mire,

where there is no foothold;

I have come into deep waters,

and the flood sweeps over me.

³ I am weary with my crying out;

my throat is parched.

My eyes grow dim

with waiting for my God.

⁴ More in number than the hairs of my head

are those who hate me without cause;

mighty are those who would destroy me,

those who attack me with lies.

What I did not steal

must I now restore?

⁵ O God, you know my folly;

the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you.

The Psalmist, David, begins by picturing his life threatened by a swelling flood or high wave. It is the picture of helplessness. You can't do much else but concentrate on surviving when the water comes up to your neck. You can be

standing at the edge of an ocean. Then a huge wave comes in to surround you. As it flows back into the ocean, it drags the sand upon which you stand with it. The wave destabilizes your ability to keep standing and you struggle to stay upright.

This is the life of someone whose circumstances threaten to overwhelm them. When life gets like that, what often happens to our prayer lives or time with God? We stop or we claim we don't have time to pray because of that which presses in on us. Or we say we'll get back to prayer when things have settled down. But this Psalmist teaches us that in the midst of the swelling waters stopping prayer is the worst choice we could make. We must **Cry out to God** (1-5).

David has no shame in crying out. He is in desperate need. Like someone who has gone out in a lake to the point where they can't touch the bottom, he feels like his life is out of control. Somehow his security has been disturbed and he can't find solid ground. Yet this is not a new development. It's been going on for a while. In verse 3 we see his constant crying out for help results in a parched throat. This past summer we watched a show about a lady who regularly kept in shape by running with her dog. She lived near the desert so she would run out through some desert canyons. But one day, she did not come back. Her family began to worry. She had fallen and broken her pelvis so she couldn't move. She spent 3 days and two nights laying on the same spot crying out for help. Eventually her dog went out and found some searchers. The dog brought them to the canyon where she lay. But they couldn't quite find her until she cried out with the last strength of her parched throat. They found her and she was saved. David still cries out and his eyes grow tired and less sharp from constantly looking out for deliverance.

In verse 4, he reveals that his problem has to do with people. Many, more in number than the hairs of his head, hate him without cause. Powerful enemies who would love to see him destroyed. David served as Israel's king for 40 years. During that time, he did accumulate some enemies. Now they accuse him and want to destroy him with lies. The end of verse 4 reveals they charge him with stealing. They clamor for him to repay a debt that he does not owe. So he cries out "What I did not steal, must I now restore?"

Then David does what many of us do when things go wrong in our lives. We wonder if we did something wrong to cause it. So David confesses his sin. He admits that he is not perfect. He recognizes that God knows about the wrongs he has done. Yet it seems David appeals to the fact that God knows the wrongs he has done and hasn't done.

This wrong he's now accused of doing is something he has not done. So David cries out to God. That's the first step in praying through an overwhelming circumstance.

But then David does something that seems a little strange at first. He describes what's happening to God.

- ⁶ Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me,
 O Lord GOD of hosts;
 let not those who seek you be brought to dishonor through me,
 O God of Israel.
- ⁷ For it is for your sake that I have borne reproach,
 that dishonor has covered my face.
- ⁸ I have become a stranger to my brothers,
 an alien to my mother's sons.
- ⁹ For zeal for your house has consumed me,
 and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.
- ¹⁰ When I wept and humbled my soul with fasting,
 it became my reproach.
- ¹¹ When I made sackcloth my clothing,
 I became a byword to them.
- ¹² I am the talk of those who sit in the gate,
 and the drunkards make songs about me.

This is the second step in David's pattern for this prayer. **Describe what's happening to God (6-12).** Tell God about the circumstances you face.

David prays that even though he's facing tough times, he will not dishonor God's name. He doesn't want others who fear God to be shamed because of how he acts during this time. Then we discover that his suffering is somehow connected to honoring the Lord. "For it is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that dishonor has covered my face." He's not shaking a fist against God. He's simply describing the reality. "I am suffering because of standing up for you Lord." The nature of his stand becomes clearer in verse 9. "For zeal for your house has consumed me and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me." So somehow David showed zeal or passion for the house of the Lord. Maybe he proposed building of a house for the Lord. Maybe he defended the need for Israel to remain true to the house of the Lord. Maybe he called for a national repentance or pointed out a lack of holiness.

Whatever it was, he took heat for it. In fact, when he mourned and fasted over the situation, they made fun of him. People who sat at the gate talked about silly David. Even drunks sang about him. Now think about the irony of that. If you followed David's story from his teenage years to adulthood, you know that God gave him a special blessing to bring Israel many military victories. The people sang about David – that though their current king killed thousands, David led their armies to kill ten thousands. He was the most popular and respected leader in the land. Eventually, he

became king and was called a man after God's own heart. But now there's a new song going around about David sung by drunks.

What kind of songs do drunks sing? Well, a lot of the time, they're mocking songs about someone or something. They are songs that you wouldn't sing if you were sober. But when drunk with your social filter stripped away, you sometimes let loose with what you really think about a situation or person. Here, the drunks sing some mocking song about David.

David describes all this to God. But I called this strange. Why? Well it's not like God didn't know what was going on. God didn't need David to explain to him what was happening. So why describe to God what's happening in prayer? Well, it helps us. We can experience a lot of confusion when life nears the overwhelming state. Thoughts and problems swirl around in our mind like a whirlwind stirring up everything on a dusty street. Yet if we stop and actually write down or nail down in our minds what's going on, we can grab hold of what we're really dealing with.

Joni Eareckson writes "When trouble blindsides you and almost knocks you silly, you are understandably bewildered. You feel confusion and panic. You may feel afraid that more hardship will come on top of it all. But at some point, somewhere along the line, if you don't stop feeling and start thinking about what's next, you'll freeze." So describing what's going on to God. This helps us get a hold of what we're thinking and reassures us that God is with us in these details.

Then David takes the next step in his prayer.

¹³ But as for me, my prayer is to you, O LORD.

At an acceptable time, O God,
in the abundance of your steadfast love answer me in your saving faithfulness.

¹⁴ Deliver me

from sinking in the mire;

let me be delivered from my enemies

and from the deep waters.

¹⁵ Let not the flood sweep over me,

or the deep swallow me up,

or the pit close its mouth over me.

¹⁶ Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good;

according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.

¹⁷ Hide not your face from your servant;

for I am in distress; make haste to answer me.

¹⁸ Draw near to my soul, redeem me;

ransom me because of my enemies!

The third movement in this pattern for prayer is **Appeal to God for deliverance (13-18)**. Notice the change from the first five verses. There, David just cried out listing his sufferings. But now He appeals for God to act. Deliver me. Let not the flood sweep over me. Answer me. Hide not your face. Redeem me. Ransom me. Through this section, He portrays God as the deliverer or savior or redeemer.

These are all appeals directly to the Lord to act. Notice David is now not only crying out. He has a clearer sense of God. He prays, “at an acceptable time, O God, answer me.” So He recognizes God’s wisdom and sovereignty over timing. He remembers God’s saving faithfulness, steadfast love and abundant mercy. He’s beginning to see more of God than the flood of his circumstances. God becomes bigger than David’s circumstances. The reality is God is always bigger than our circumstances. But we need to stop, pray and rediscover God when some new overwhelming situation comes along.

Then comes a kind of shocking passage to our modern sensitivities. Verses 19-29.

- ¹⁹You know my reproach,
and my shame and my dishonor;
my foes are all known to you.
- ²⁰Reproaches have broken my heart,
so that I am in despair.
- I looked for pity, but there was none,
and for comforters, but I found none.
- ²¹They gave me poison for food,
and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.
- ²²Let their own table before them become a snare;
and when they are at peace, let it become a trap.
- ²³Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see,
and make their loins tremble continually.
- ²⁴Pour out your indignation upon them,
and let your burning anger overtake them.
- ²⁵May their camp be a desolation;
let no one dwell in their tents.
- ²⁶For they persecute him whom you have struck down,
and they recount the pain of those you have wounded.
- ²⁷Add to them punishment upon punishment;
may they have no acquittal from you.
- ²⁸Let them be blotted out of the book of the living;
let them not be enrolled among the righteous.
- ²⁹But I am afflicted and in pain;
let your salvation, O God, set me on high!

David prays for his persecutor’s destruction. He calls upon God to hold up justice. He recounts a few more of their dreadful deeds towards him. They shamed and dishonored him. He suffered greatly and looked for sympathy.

Instead, they tried to harm him further. They gave him poison for food and sour wine for drink. We don't know if they physically gave David poisoned food. If they did, we don't hear about it in other parts of his story. And we know they weren't successful because David died naturally at an old age. So it's more likely the words they spoke were like poisoned food and sour wine.

Then David lets loose on his persecutors. He wants their own table to become a snare. He wants them to physically suffer so their eyes become weak and they have no strength to stand. The image of loins trembling is of someone struggling to stand up because they are shaking in the core of their body. But not only does he want them to suffer on earth. He wants punishment upon punishment added to them through eternity so they are blotted out of the book of life.

So what are we to do with this section of the prayer? Are we given the green light to pray for our persecutor's destruction? Well, we can certainly pray that God would carry out justice where there has been no repentance. He will do that either in this life or certainly on Judgement Day. But David lived before the cross. We live after the cross on which Jesus died where justice for sin was placed upon Jesus.

Did you notice, as we have travelled through this Psalm, the verses that could easily apply to Jesus life? Verse 7 – For it is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that dishonor has covered my face.” Couldn't we say that about Jesus as He carried out His father's plan? The Gospel writers use verse 9 “zeal for your house consumes me,” and apply it to Jesus' cleansing of the temple from the money traders. The reproach, shame and dishonor of verse 19 all apply to Christ. And verse 21 directly alludes to Jesus' receiving sour wine to drink on the cross just before his death. Yet there is one major difference between David and Jesus here. David prayed for his persecutor's destruction. Jesus prayed for his persecutor's salvation. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

This becomes the fourth section of praying through overwhelming circumstances. **Pray for your persecutors destruction (19-29)**. When we recapture a perspective with God in the picture, we recognize the need our persecutors have for him. If they fall into the hands of the living God without having their sin atoned for, they face a fearful judgment. They too need God just as we do. So we pray that God will work in their lives and turn them to repentance.

The Psalm concludes on an entirely different note from where it started.

³⁰ I will praise the name of God with a song;
I will magnify him with thanksgiving.

- ³¹This will please the LORD more than an ox
or a bull with horns and hoofs.
- ³²When the humble see it they will be glad;
you who seek God, let your hearts revive.
- ³³For the LORD hears the needy
and does not despise his own people who are prisoners.
- ³⁴Let heaven and earth praise him,
the seas and everything that moves in them.
- ³⁵For God will save Zion
and build up the cities of Judah,
and people shall dwell there and possess it;
- ³⁶ the offspring of his servants shall inherit it,
and those who love his name shall dwell in it.

Praise the Lord for His compassionate help (30-36). David has moved from despair to hope. He recognizes God's compassionate help for those in need. No longer do his circumstances overwhelm him. He is overwhelmed by the mercy and help of God. Verse 33 is so key. "For the Lord hears the needy and does not despise his own people who are prisoners. The poor and prisoners are often despised and ignored in most societies. But in God's kingdom, he hears the needy and does not despise prisoners.

But why is the Psalmist freed from his burden? Nothing circumstantially has changed. Yet calling out to God has helped. Why? He knows God is trustworthy. He knows God is bigger than this. He has some experience with God that shows that he actually can leave the trouble with God. His renewed perspective gives him hope.

This is what Jesus did through the most intense and difficult experience of His life. He turned to God and prayed throughout those hours of agony. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed in prison after the trials. He prayed while on the cross. This helped and sustained Him through the hardest human experience ever in history. No one else had to bear the sins of the world while being themselves sinless.

We pray to the God who has an abundance of steadfast love – 13; answers in saving faithfulness – 13; delivers us; has abundant mercy – 16; draws near to His people – 18; redeems us – 18; ransoms us – 18; listens to His people –; brings justice upon the wrongdoer – 22-28; and saves – 29.

And ultimately, we have one who went through sufferings like those described in this Psalm, so that we might be able to intimately connect with God this way. He endured our scorn and mocking so we might be forgiven. So our God who sacrificed much so that we might be in relationship with Him we can connect with Him through anything we face. He awaits our coming to Him when life threatens to overwhelm us.

So let us practice what we've just learned. Think of a situation that threatens to overwhelm your life right now.

- Cry out to God.
- Describe what's happening.
- Ask God to deliver you in whatever ways are best.
- God, I pray for my enemies and ask God to work in their hearts.
- Praise that God hears, cares and responds in prayer.