



# THINK ON THESE THINGS

*Philippians 4:8*

July-August-September, 2015 • Volume 46, No. 3

## PRAYING LIKE DAVID

By AL DIESTELKAMP

If like me you sometimes find yourself becoming dissatisfied with your personal prayers to God and want to do something about it, it would be good to go to some of the psalms of David. Many of the psalms are actually prayers that can be adapted to fit our own life situations. Such is the case with **PSALM 143**.

1 *Hear my prayer, O Lord,  
Give ear to my supplications!  
In Your faithfulness answer me,  
And in Your righteousness.*

There are at least twelve New Testament passages which assure us that God hears and answers prayer (i.e., 1 Jn. 5:14-15). Why then do we ask God for what He has already promised? It's not because we don't believe God will keep His promise. It's like a child asking his parents to protect him even though they have assured him time and again that they are there for him. Or it's like a wife asking her husband if he still loves her even though he vowed to do so "till death do they part."

2 *Do not enter into judgment with Your servant,  
For in Your sight no one living is righteous.*

This is a confession of fault from "a man after God's own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14). Like David, we must acknowledge that none of us is able to prevail in front of a just judge. As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). It is true that one day we will all have to stand before God in judgment (Heb. 9:27); but like David, I don't seek justice; I seek mercy.

3 *For the enemy has persecuted my soul;  
He has crushed my life to the ground;  
He has made me dwell in darkness,  
Like those who have long been dead.*

4 *Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me;  
My heart within me is distressed.*

This was likely a time when David was in exile, hiding from King Saul. He felt as if he had been crushed. He was forced to dwell in "darkness" of caves that are more suited as graves. He felt overwhelmed!

How blessed we are by the lack of physical persecution. Not all Christians in the world can say this. But keep in mind that we, too, have no assurance that such persecution will not come to us in future days. Are we prepared?

5 *I remember the days of old;  
I meditate on all Your works;  
I muse on the work of Your hands.*

6 *I spread out my hands to You;  
My soul longs for You like a thirsty land.*

Maybe David longed for the "good old days" when he was lauded as a hero in Israel. You know, when he stood before a giant and said, "I come to you in the name of the Lord..." (see 1 Sam 17:45-47); or when women danced in the streets, singing, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (1 Sam. 18:7). Like David, we need to thirst for God's help and "spread out our hands" in prayer.

7 *Answer me speedily, O Lord;  
My spirit fails!  
Do not hide Your face from me,  
Lest I be like those who go down into the pit.*

8 *Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning,  
For in You do I trust;  
Cause me to know the way in which I should walk,  
For I lift up my soul to You.*

When David felt his own spirit failing, he called on God not to hide His face from him. He feared an untimely death and called on God's lovingkindness to take him through the night. He expressed trust in the Lord and asked to know which way to walk. No matter the circumstances, we need to trust the Lord and ask for guidance in the way we walk.

9 *Deliver me, O Lord, from my enemies;  
In You I take shelter.*

10 *Teach me to do Your will,  
For You are my God;  
Your Spirit is good.*

*Lead me in the land of uprightness.*

David depended on God as his shelter and asked to be "led" in the right way. King Saul was not David's only enemy. Like us, he had a much more formidable enemy in the person of Satan. Even if one is able to escape his human enemies by his own wit and might, he would be foolish to think he can defeat Satan by himself.

It is imperative to recognize who our real enemy is. Our only hope in defeating him is to seek God's help. We must take "shelter" in God and rely on Him to lead us in uprightness.

11 *Revive me, O Lord, for Your name's sake!  
For Your righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.*

12 *In Your mercy cut off my enemies,  
And destroy all those who afflict my soul;*

*For I am Your servant.*

David had confidence that God in His mercy would save him from his enemies because he served God. For us, God has put an end to the force of our enemy through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ.

Consider David's words in other psalms:

### PSALM 25

4 *Show me Your ways, O Lord;  
Teach me Your paths.*

5 *Lead me in your truth and teach me,  
for You are the God of my salvation.*

### PSALM 86

11 *Teach me Your way, O Lord;  
I will walk in your truth.*

God will judge the world in justice, but He offers mercy to all who serve Him. Let us serve God by being "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (Jas. 1:22).

# THE BIG IF

*So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did regularly.*

~Job 1:5~

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

Job craved righteousness for his family so much that he regularly got up early and sacrificed for each of them just in case they had sinned. If they had, Job wanted them forgiven. If they had cursed God, Job sought His mercy. If their hearts weren't right, Job wanted to atone for it. These are a lot of ifs. Job thought about God like the Psalmist: "For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You" (Psa. 86:5). So in faith we pray and sing,

*If I have wounded any soul today,  
If I have caused one foot to go astray,  
If I have walked in my own willful way,  
Dear Lord, forgive!*

(Charles H. Gabriel, *An Evening Prayer*)

I'm wondering if we show the character of God in forgiving others—especially in the area of ifs. What do we do when someone says to us, "If what I did was a sin against you, I apologize." "If I offended you, I'm sorry." "If I showed hate in my heart toward you, forgive me"? The response often is, "IF!? Do you realize what you did? Do you see how much pain and suffering you produced!? How can you say, 'If'? There's no IF about it!"

Ephesians 4:31-32 has a lot to say about forgiveness: "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." Sometimes it is hard to forgive because bitterness, wrath, anger, and malice are being savored in our hearts because

we feel the offender deserves punishment rather than mercy. Clamor (fighting) and evil speaking (slander) are how the world naturally responds when people do terrible things, but we are not of the world. We are to respond in a radically different way.

"...forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). We do our best in our service to our Lord, but we still aren't perfect—imperfect faith, imperfect obedience, imperfect repentance, imperfect confession. We are drawn to God's perfection, but we still have to join David in pleading to God, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins..." (Psa. 19:12-13). Do we forgive others in the same way we ask God to forgive us? Does the apology have to be

worded precisely as we think it should be? Must it be the first and the last time to merit our forgiveness? (Matt. 18:21-22) Can there be no ifs involved?

Jesus asked if we only love those who love us, only do good to those who do good to us, and only lend to those who can repay us, how are we any different from the world? (Lk. 6:32-34) Following Christ makes us radically different, and that includes forgiving as He forgives. Is how we forgive any different from how the world forgives? Are people amazed when they see how we forgive, get past relationship problems, and maintain fellowship and unity? God's grace is amazing! His children's grace should be amazing too!

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## Sailors in Foxholes

By STEVE FONTENOT

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). I am a "father"—would you allow me to discipline your child as I deemed best? Why not? Because I am not the "father" of your boy or girl? Granted. Now, suppose I was a boy scout troop director and your boy was in my troop. Would you agree that I would then have some authority over that boy—based on *this* relationship?

"Wives, be subject to your own husbands" (Eph. 5:22). I am a "husband"—would you allow me to tell your wife how to spend the grocery money, what clothes to buy, etc.? Why not? Because I do not sustain the relationship of "husband" to *that* woman? Agreed. However, if I owned a business and your wife worked for me, you would agree I then would have authority over her based on the employer-employee relationship? And my authority would *begin* and *end* on the basis of that relationship, right?

"I exhort the elders among you...shepherd the flock of God *among you*" (1 Pet. 5:1,2). This oversight would include the members of *that* flock desiring to have fellowship with a preacher by supporting him (Phi. 1:1; 4:14-16), or the members of *that*

*flock* needing relief and receiving funds from other Christians (Acts 11:27-30). Money sent *from that flock* for the work of Christ, or received *for that flock* for the work of Christ would fall under these elders jurisdiction. However, what about money that neither came *from that flock* nor is *for that flock*? Are "elders" given jurisdiction over *brotherhood* projects? Is not an elder's oversight based on his relationship to *a particular church*—the one "*among you*"? And does not his authority as a "shepherd" *begin* and *end* in the sphere of *that* relationship? When elders "assume" the oversight of anything beyond the local church of which they are shepherds, are they not "assuming" without Divine authority?

Fathers are not functioning as "fathers" when they exercise authority over *children other than their own*. Husbands are not functioning as "husbands" when they rule women *other than their own wives*. Elders are not functioning as "elders" when they exercise authority over the funds of churches *other than the flock "among them."*

To call men "elders" when exercising oversight over *anything* but "*the flock among them*" is somewhat like speaking of "sailors" in foxholes. Both belie the true situation. *One is a departure from God's plan.*

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Published quarterly in the interest of purity of doctrine and practice by the Diestelkamp family. Distributed free in quantities and as ability permits.

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# Are Only Members of The Church of Christ Saved?

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

How would you answer the title question above? Admittedly, it is a loaded question. How it should be answered depends, in part, on what the questioner means by “The Church of Christ.” A typical answer to the question often involves pointing to scriptures that emphasize that the church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22,23) and that there is only one body (4:4). This is a fair answer if the questioner means to ask, “Are only those who are members of Christ’s body saved from their sins?” However, if the questioner means, “Are only those who are part of a local ‘church of Christ’ that is sound in doctrine and practice saved?” then the foregoing answer is misleading because it uses scriptures pertaining to the “universal church” to answer a question asked about the necessity of having a relationship with a “local church” for salvation.

Indeed, what many who ask such a question may *really* be asking is, “Are only members of the Church of Christ denomination saved?” In this case, the answer requires the correction of some misunderstanding. First, it must be noted that—relative to Jesus Christ—the word *church* is used in two distinct ways in Scripture: 1) the body of all saved in Christ, 2) a group of professing disciples of Christ who assemble together to edify (1 Cor. 14:1-5), motivate (Heb. 10:24,25), and submit to one another (Phil. 2:1-5). Second, neither of these two distinct usages of the word *church* support or imply any kind of denominational organization.

A denomination is most simply defined as “a religious organization uniting in a single legal and administrative body a number of local congregations” (Webster’s 7th New Collegiate Dictionary). No such “body” is revealed in Scripture. Denominations are the invention of men, not the design of God. This is why they should be opposed.

The church of Christ *is* pictured as a body (as already noted), but this one church is not pictured as “a body made up of a number of local congregations.” If we picture the church of Christ as being a religious organization uniting in a single body all the scripturally-sound, local congregations, then we have a picture that is just as unscriptural and unsound as any other denominational structure. In Scripture the body of Christ is consistently pictured as being comprised of individual saints as members (Rom. 12:4,5; 1 Cor. 12:12) and never local churches. This distinction may seem like a minor technicality; yet its disregard has led many to justify denominational structures

and led others to oppose those denominations with bad answers that essentially amount to teaching that Jesus’ promise to build His church (Matt. 16:18) was actually a promise to build His denomination.

Some who identify themselves with “The Church of Christ” have left the impression that *only* those who faithfully attend a “sound Church of Christ” are saved. Does Jesus have churches (plural) which belong to Him? Most assuredly, as is evident from the oft-cited “the churches of Christ salute you” (Rom. 16:16). However, if some think this warrants the picture of the one church of Christ being the uniting in a single body of a number of local congregations, then they are more denominational than they will admit, and this contributes to the confusion. It is no wonder then that the impression has been left with many that members of the Church of Christ denomination think they are the only saved.

Salvation is only found in Jesus Christ. We do not get into Christ through *the* church much less *a* church. Quite the opposite, we get into *the* one church *through* Jesus Christ. When we respond to the gospel of the grace of God in faith and repentance and submit to being buried into Jesus’ death in baptism (Rom. 6:3) and into His name for the remission of sins (Ac. 2:38), we become sons of God (Gal. 3:26,27), are raised to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4), and are added to the one group of those who have done likewise (Ac. 2:41,47).

Are only members of *the* one church of Christ saved? Yes, because *the* one church of Christ *is* the body of those saved in Christ Jesus. This one church of Christ is not a denomination comprised of local churches of Christ.

Are all those who are part of a local “church of Christ” also members of *the* one church of Christ? No. Indeed, like Sardis and Laodicea of old, there are some among churches of Christ who imagine they are spiritually alive or rich simply because

they are part of a group that has “the right name,” “the right doctrine,” and “the right forms of worship.” But we do not connect with God by connecting with churches. We connect with God only through Jesus Christ. It is important that we understand and appreciate this.

Are only those who are a part of “sound churches of Christ” saved? Again, the answer is no. This is demonstrated to be true by Jesus’ own words to the dead church in Sardis. “You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy” (Rev. 3:4). For this we can all be thankful. Salvation is not based on connection to a local church, a group of churches, or a particular restoration movement. Salvation is based on one’s connection to Christ.

Does this mean that it is of no importance as to what local church one joins himself? No, it means that one’s relationship with God is through Christ and is not inherently dependent on the congregation to which one joins himself. Still, we *must* beware to what local church we join ourselves because “evil companionship corrupts” (1 Cor. 15:33). This stern warning was written to the same local church that was also told earlier that “a little leaven leavens the whole lump” (5:6) and was admonished in a later letter to “not be unequally yoked with unbelievers” (2 Cor. 6:14). Indeed, many other first century churches were imperfect groups of saints and sinners who needed to repent and were duly warned to do so or perish (Rev. 2 & 3). Interestingly, not one of those churches of Christ remains today, but *the* one church of Christ does. Therefore, our loyalty must always be first to Christ and His body to which we have been added by His grace and not to the local churches to which we temporarily join ourselves during this sojourn.

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## Springfield Congregation Begins Meeting



Sunday, June 7th, marked the first worship assembly for the new congregation in Springfield, Illinois. Initially, the house pictured here (located just a few blocks away from the state capitol) will serve as the meetingplace for the church as well as the home of Ken & Penny McDaniel. A cordial welcome is extended to area residents and travelers.

Bible study 9:30 a.m.  
Worship 10:30 a.m.

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# Speaking Truth 'With Grace, Seasoned With Salt'

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Most of us can testify that there are certain foods that are not very palatable without adding some salt. Even the scriptures quote Job's rhetorical questions, "Can flavorless food be eaten without salt? Or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" (Job 6:6).

The Holy Spirit guided the apostle Paul to use our knowledge of this to illustrate the need to use wisdom, gentleness, and tact in our conversations: "Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Col. 4:5-6).

While Paul's primary focus in this text is on our conversations with "those who are outside," I doubt that anything less would be expected when speaking with brethren. In fact, he makes this clear in another epistle, urging Christians to "keep the unity in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3) by "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). The wisdom of Solomon testifies that "The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious" (Eccl. 10:12), and "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1).

There are some foods that I hate, and no amount of salt is going to change my mind about it. Similarly, most of the world does not love truth. Jesus declared Himself to be "the truth" (Jn. 14:6) and, as such, "the light of the world" (Jn. 9:5). But He warned that men "loved darkness rather than light" (Jn. 3:19). Our task is to try to change people's "taste" from "darkness" to

"light." In doing this our speech must "always be with grace, seasoned with salt," all the while realizing that gentleness and tact will not make truth palatable to those who love darkness.

Unfortunately, even some whom we may call "brethren" don't care much for truth. Paul wrote of an approaching apostasy causing people to "perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thess. 2:10). They who did not *receive* the love of the truth had actually *refused* the truth in exchange for a lie so they could have "pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. 2:12).

To love the truth is to *regard* it, which does not always equate with *liking* it. Truth is not always likeable. Truth sometimes *hurts*. It sometimes *saddens*. It may *disappoint* or *discourage*. But even so, it is still to be *loved*.

Along with truth comes responsibility, and love of the truth demands change. If while trying to reach a destination, I find

that I have been misguided as to the route I must take, or I have mistakenly taken a wrong turn, learning the truth may be unpleasant; but it benefits me if I regard it. In spiritual terms, this is called repentance. There's no virtue in being unyielding.

## Too Much Salt

Dieticians often warn about the dangers of the overuse of salt. Regardless of the health risks, we know that too much salt defeats the purpose of making food palatable. In our pluralistic society which has taken political correctness to the extreme, there is the danger of our speech becoming so gentle and tactful that the power of truth is missed altogether. We do people no favor by altering truth in an effort to avoid hurt feelings and also risk causing genuine truth-seekers to gag at our lack of conviction. We *can* "contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude 3) without being contentious, by speaking the truth in love and using speech with grace, seasoned with salt.

## Articles From the Days Gone By 'He Could, If He Would'

By LESLIE DIESTELKAMP (1911-1995)

Often, when one fails to reach a goal, others say of him, "He did what he could." It is indeed praiseworthy if a person has done that much, even though more was needed. If one truly did all he could, he deserves commendation.

Regretfully, we notice that more often it is said, "He could have done it if he would." Most of us just don't nearly measure up to our abilities.

There are those who *could* make the Bible classes better by their attendance and attention, *but they don't*. Some *could* improve the effectiveness of the Sunday night

assemblies by coming as they do in the morning, *but they don't*.

Many people *could* improve the ability of the church to send out the gospel message to lost humanity, *but they don't*, and as a result there isn't enough money to support all the workers who would go into the fields.

Some churches *could* help send a preacher into a needy field, *but they don't* because they are too concerned about buildings, carpets, and the *physical things*, forgetting the true significance of the *spiritual* nature of the house of God (1 Pet. 2:5).

*This article was first published in the Aurora Bulletin, October, 1964*

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Printing & supplies	\$ 85.00
Postage (U.S. & Canada)	426.08
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TOTAL COSTS	\$ 552.48
Funds available for past issue	455.81
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