

Introduction: One of the most earnest and urgent of desires, prayers and needs we can ever present to God is that *we must have* His help in a timely way! Does that sound impatient or even demanding for us to pray like that? Well, take heart – both in the Psalms and in the rest of the Scriptures, there are abundant grounds for us to *humbly expect* and *patiently hope* that God’s help for our trials and dark experiences *will be timely as well as perfectly equipped to help us in our time of need!*

Monday: read Psalm 46:1-3 and Hebrews 4:15-16. The Psalmist reassures us that God is a “very present” help in trouble. No matter how narrow the straits of difficulty in which we find ourselves; no matter how far off comfort and hope seem to be – God’s grace is such that it can be relied upon to be “very present” and “readily found” when we need it. To put it in terms of Hebrews 4:16, no matter how many foundations of basic life have been or are being destroyed; no matter how pressing our afflictions, temptations, life-changes or even deadly dangers are - there is always a way to approach God’s throne of mercy.

Meditate and Pray: Sing about this every accessible and timely mercy and grace with hymn # 507:

*Approach, my soul, the mercy seat,
Where Jesus answers prayer;
There humbly fall before His feet,
For none can perish there.*

*Thy promise is my only plea,
With this I venture nigh;
Thou callest burdened souls to Thee,
And such, O Lord, am I.*

*Bowed down beneath a load of sin,
By Satan sorely pressed,
By war without and fears within,
I come to Thee for rest.*

*Be Thou my Shield and hiding Place,
That, sheltered by Thy side,
I may my fierce accuser face,
And tell him Thou hast died!*

*O wondrous love! to bleed and die,
To bear the cross and shame,
That guilty sinners, such as I,
Might plead Thy gracious name.*

*Poor tempest tossed soul, be still;
My promised grace receive;
'Tis Jesus speaks—I must, I will,
I can, I do believe.*

Tues/Weds: read John 4:48-5:9 and Hebrews 4:12-14. There is a key connection between the *timely help* promised us at Christ’s mercy seat (Heb. 4:16), and the living and active power of God’s Word in Hebrews 4:12! It is because the Word of God is life-giving and sin-convicting that the souls of men can find salvation when they hear that Word of the Gospel! And such a “word” is always a demonstration of the “timely mercy” we need in our time of helplessness and sin-bound need.

For example, when did the father of the deathly sick child in John 4 find salvation? It was *when it was discovered* that the healing of the child took place at the very moment when the words from Christ were uttered: “Your child will live.” In the same way in John 5:8, it was when Christ said, “Rise, take up your bed and walk” that the paralytic found spiritual as well as physical life! That “word” of command from Christ “made him whole”!

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks for the power of Christ’s Word. John 5:1-9’s miracle of making the lame man “whole” helps us to see this power of the Word of Jesus Christ. As James Philip wrote:

When the paralytic, in response to Jesus’ question, ‘Do you want to be made well?’ told Christ of his inability to move, our Lord replied with the royal command, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk.’ It was at that point that the miracle happened. The one thing the man could not do was to rise. That had been his whole trouble for 38 years. But the word of Christ to him was a word of power, a creative word, which bridged the gulf between the grace of God and his utter need. Grace came to him in the command to rise and enabled him to do so. And so it is with the word of the gospel and with its summons to repent. It contains within itself the power to break the bondage and tyranny of indwelling sin and bestows such saving power on us as a gift of grace, enabling us to turn to God.

Thurs/Fri: read John 5:1-26. We may marvel at the power of the Word of Christ in the life of the paralytic while at the same time doubting, in our discouragements, that Christ's Word will ever have that power in our lives. But notice how the promise of John 5:24-25 clearly *identifies us* as recipients of that same powerful word which the paralytic heard. Jesus says there:

²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life.

²⁵ "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the **dead** will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

Don't you find your life described in these two verses? Before you knew Christ, were you not "dead" in your sins (verse 25)? Do you not many times find yourself like the Apostle Paul fighting against "this body of death", composed of the remnants of your sin nature even after you become a Christian, (Rom. 7:24)? Well, over all such deadening experience of sin; over all our discouraging despair when we say to ourselves – "Won't I ever change?", Christ speaks His Word that guarantees spiritual life as our possession by faith in Him!

I especially love the perfect tense which Christ uses in John 5:24 to describe our possessing eternal life the moment we believe. Such a believing one "does not come into judgment *but has passed* from death to life."

In other words, Christ uses the perfect tense here to denote a fundamental change in our status from the very first moment we believe in Him and His saving work for us on the Cross. Moreover, that status continues into the present... We passed into the state of salvation when we first believed, and we continue to live in that eternal life until the very end! That is what the perfect tense in Greek means. It refers to an action in the past, (we believed), which continues to have its full impact in the present and future: (we believe and have life now and forever!).

Meditate and Pray: Sing about the rock-solid possession of eternal life which you have gained by grace through faith. Praise God especially that, *now*, no one can snatch you out of Christ's hand! As hymn 463 puts it, by Augustus Toplady:

*My name from the palms of His hands, eternity will not erase.
Impressed on His heart it remains, in marks of indelible grace.
Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the promise is given;
More happy, but not more secure,
The glorified spirits in heav'n.*

Sat/Sun: read John 5:24-40. Whenever Christ speaks, those who are given the gift of faith from God's Holy Spirit, 'pass from death to life' (John 5:24)! But it is through the Word of God in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments that Christ comes to give life to dead sinners! This is what makes the Scriptures so important in our salvation. The very first membership vow, in fact, in our denomination, highlights the Word as the place where we find salvation when it asks us:

Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the Word of God, and its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?

But now notice, that the enemies of Christ, who sought to kill Him for claiming equality with God the Father (John 5:18), are the very ones whom Christ accuses of "searching the Scriptures" (John 5:39-40), all the while refusing to come to Him that they might have life! Here is where the Jewish handcuffs on the Scriptures did them in and condemned them to a dead religion with no true experience of salvation!

Yes, they read and even searched the Scriptures! But they elevated their own traditions above them, (Mark 7:6-8), thereby misusing God's Word and cutting themselves off from the goal of the Scriptures, in the revelation of Christ. They never arrived at Christ as the final revelation of God because they distorted God's Word to fit their own traditions! What a sober warning from our Lord!

Meditate and Pray: *“Lord save us and our children from every false religion that elevates man-made religious traditions to the level of Scripture. Help us to see that the lamentable result of such man-made interpretations of Scripture is not merely the fracturing of the body of Christ into many denominations – but far worse, the wholesale obscuring of Christ as the goal of the Scriptures. When Scripture is not allowed to interpret Scripture, the full, saving picture of Christ is lost.*

On the other hand, thank you that your Holy Spirit, Father, enables us to find Christ in all the Scriptures, magnifying Him and His saving work as our only hope. Please remove all the veils from our eyes which prevent us from seeing His glory alone on the pages of holy writ! Amen!