

# How to Pray When You Feel Like Giving Up

10/27/2013

Scripture: [Psalm 11:1](#)

Series: [With Christ in the School of Prayer \(3/5\)](#)

By: [Colin Smith](#)

How can you say to my soul, “flee like a bird to the mountain...?” **Psalm 11:1**

Someone is speaking into David’s soul. The advice David received came in through his ear and went straight to his heart: “Flee like a bird to your mountain...” It’s time to move on. Why? Two reasons:

1. “For behold the wicked bend the bow; they have fitted their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart” (Psalm 11:2). There’s going to be trouble and, David, you are the target! Better get out of here.
2. “If the foundations are destroyed what can the righteous do” (Psalm 11:3). David, you’ve done your very best. There’s no point in carrying on. Nothing you can do will ever make any difference.

It’s not hard to see why people would say this to David. The reign of King Saul was a complete disaster. To faithful people, it must have seemed that Saul was destroying the foundations of Israel.

## What can the righteous do?

If the foundations are destroyed what can the righteous do? **Psalm 11:3**

There used to be a Judeo-Christian consensus in our country: 1. There is a God in heaven. 2. He gave Ten Commandments by which we should live, and 3. “In God we trust.”

All this might be pretty thin for a lot of people, but at least it gave some foundation for life and for talking to people about sin and our need for Christ as savior.

But much of that has gone! In the minds of many people, “god” is whoever they want “he, she, or it” to be. And if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? What can the righteous do when everything is falling apart?

Who is giving this advice to David? We are not told, but most likely, these were the words of a friend who cared about him deeply. And it was entirely reasonable advice.

David got himself in to some pretty dangerous situations: He had been chosen by God to replace King Saul. But Saul fought against this till the end of his life. Saul was given to fits of rage and on one occasion he threw a javelin at David attempting to pin him to the wall (1 Samuel 19:10).

It would be very natural for someone who cared about David to say, “David, Saul has it in for you. His arrows are aimed at you. You are a righteous man, but you are not safe. There’s nothing you can do here. Flee like a bird to your mountain.

Indeed this is exactly what happened. David was married to Saul’s daughter Michal. And after Saul had thrown the spear, she said to David, “If you don’t leave tonight, Saul will kill you.”

Saul had sent his agents to David’s house. So Michal let her husband down on a rope from the bedroom window, and put a stuffed dummy in his bed to allow him time to escape. The Bible says “David fled and escaped” (1 Samuel 19:18).

### **Should I stay or should I go?**

There are times when that is the right thing to do. Jesus said, “When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next” (Matthew 10:23). But another time a crowd in the temple took up stones to stone Jesus, and Scripture says, “Jesus hid himself” (John 8:59).

When we face situations of difficulty and danger we always have a choice: Should I stay or should I go? If someone is pointing a javelin at you there’s a pretty good case for running to the hills!

But we all know that there are times when change is appropriate. We also face times when we know that God is calling us to persevere. What we need is the strength to do so. This psalm is for these times. It’s about how to pray when you feel like giving up.

Notice how David responds to the well-meaning advice of his friends: “In the Lord I take refuge... How can you say to my soul flee like a bird to your mountain.” How can you say to me “when the foundations are destroyed what can the righteous do?”

How did David do that? How can you do that? How can you take refuge in God when you are filled with frustration and you feel like giving up?

### *Four Ways to Pray When You Feel Like Giving Up*

Here is how to pray when you feel that nothing is coming of your effort, everyone is against you, and you need to find strength to persevere.

#### **1. Challenge the voice of fear and frustration**

How can you say to my soul “Flee like a bird to your mountain”? **Psalm 11:1**

This well-meaning advice was given by David’s friends out of fear and frustration: “Behold the wicked bend they bow; they have fitted their arrow to the string.” That’s fear. “David, you’re going to be harmed if you stick around here.

If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" That's frustration. And notice how David challenges these voices: "How can you say [these things] to my soul...?"

David is not addressing the Lord directly in this psalm. He does not say, "In you, O Lord, do I take refuge." He says, "In the Lord I take refuge."

This is a didactic (or a teaching) psalm that gives us a framework for praying when you feel like giving up.

David is challenging the thoughts of his own soul in the presence of God. And there are times when you will need to learn the art of speaking to yourself in the presence of God.

You find this many times in the Psalms: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name" (Psalm 103:1). David is speaking to himself. He is challenging himself. "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me" (Psalm 42:5)? He is challenging the disturbance within his own soul.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones often said, "One of our main problems in the Christian life is that we spend too much time listening to ourselves and not enough talking to ourselves."

We spend too much time listening to the voices of fear and frustration and complaining. We need to speak to ourselves. We sometimes call this "preaching the gospel to ourselves."

We need to challenge the voice of fear and frustration. And there is no better place to do that than when you come into the presence of God in prayer.

Come into the presence of the Father with Jesus Christ beside you. Tell him what you are feeling and what you are hearing. Bring your worst thoughts into the open, then take yourself in hand, and challenge the voice of fear and frustration right there in the presence of God.

"Lord, here's what I am afraid of. Lord, here is where I feel frustrated to the point of despair..." You may need to do this in regard to your own thoughts, and you may need to do this in regard to the well-meaning advice you are receiving from others. They may mean well, but what they are actually doing is sapping your will.

### **Jesus knows about this**

As we think about this psalm in relation to our Lord, it's pretty obvious that he knew what it was for the wicked to bend the bow, fit their arrows to the string, and to take their aim at him.

Christ was "upright in heart" (Psalm 11:2) and from the earliest days of his ministry he was in the cross-hairs of wicked men. The arrows were always pointed at him.

At least twice, Christ had to challenge the well-meaning advice of his friends: “Some Pharisees came and said to him, ‘Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you’” (Luke 13:31).

Most of the Pharisees were enemies of Jesus. But here were Pharisees who were well-disposed towards Jesus, well-meaning friends who wanted to warn him of danger.

Jesus challenged the voice of fear and despair: “Go and tell that fox, ‘behold I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course’” (Luke 13:32). In other words, “I’m not going anywhere. I’m set on my course, and I’m going to finish it.”

The second time Jesus had to resist the well-meaning advice of a friend is much better known—the time when Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16).

After Peter said this, Jesus began to tell his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, that he must suffer many things, that he must be killed, and then rise in the third day.

Peter responded, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you” (Matthew 16:22). In other words, “I’m following you, Jesus. That cannot happen to you. This is the one thing that can never happen.”

Jesus challenged the voice of fear and despair: “Get behind me, Satan!”

Satan’s temptation came in the form of the well-meaning advice of a friend who wanted to be protective of him, but who had no discernment of God’s will in this situation.

1. H. L. Ellison said this well, “The love of your friends will often create your most subtle temptations.” i People who care about you may say to you “What’s the point in carrying on? It will only take a toll on you, and nothing good will come of it.” Their words go into your soul. You need to challenge the voice of fear and

*In the LORD I take refuge!  
How can you say to my soul,  
‘Flee like a bird to your mountain?’  
In the Lord I take refuge!  
If the foundations are destroyed  
What can the righteous do?*

## **2. Recognize the hand of God in the testing**

The LORD tests the righteous... Psalm 11:5

His eyelids test the children of man... Psalm 11:4

Remember, when the foundations are shaken, the hand of God is in the shaking. God says, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens" (Hebrews 12:26).

What is God doing when he shakes the things that are familiar in our lives? God gives us the reason: He shakes the foundations so that "the things that cannot be shaken may remain" (Hebrews 12:27).

Derek Kidner comments: "The collapse of what is built on sand may be distressing; it can also be a beginning." God shakes something that's built on sand so that it might be rebuilt on a better foundation.

This is what happened to Job. Job was a righteous man, and God had blessed him in many ways. But then in one day, the whole infrastructure of his life was hit by multiple disasters.

Job's wealth, represented in flocks and herds, was plundered by raiders. His home was destroyed by a mighty wind. And worst of all, his children, who were inside the house, died in the rubble.

The foundations were shaken for Job. Suddenly all the good gifts on which we naturally depend were taken from him: Home, family, and business. It's all gone.

Job's wife said, "Why don't you curse God and die? What's the point? Everything that we've lived for is gone. Everything we've worked for is gone. God has it in for you. His arrow is obviously pointed at you. Job, you're a righteous man, but when the foundations are destroyed what's the use of faith and a righteous life? Curse God and die!"

The one right next to him was giving voice to her fears and frustrations. It must have gone right into his soul. Job heard the voice of fear, frustration, and despair, but he took refuge in God: "God knows the way that I take. When he has tested me I will come forth as gold" (Job 23:10 NIV).

The testimony of this man's faith reverberated in heaven and in hell, and even today, it brings strength to believers across the world.

Peter must have had this verse in mind when he said: Your faith is going to be tested with trials of many kinds. When that happens it is like gold being refined in the fire. Through this test, your faith will be proved genuine and it will rebound to praise glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (1 Peter 1:7).

### **3. Affirm the sovereignty of God at the hardest times**

The LORD is in his holy temple;

The LORD's throne is in heaven. **Psalm 11:4**

David overcomes fear, frustration, and the temptation to despair by fixing his mind and his heart on God. Here's how I take refuge in God. Here's how I fix my eyes on the Lord:

*The Lord is in his holy temple (11:4)*

*The Lord's throne is in heaven (11:4)*

*His eyes see (11:4)*

*The Lord tests the righteous (11:5)*

*His soul hates the wicked (11:5)*

*Let him rain coals on the wicked (11:6).*

*For the Lord is righteous (11:7)*

God is still on the throne! I may be experiencing fear or frustration but God is not in a panic. I can't put things right when the foundations are destroyed, but God can. I can't deal with the wicked, but God can, and he will.

*He loves righteous deeds (11:7)*

The foundations of righteousness do not lie in our culture. They never have. The foundations of righteousness lie in who God is and in what God loves. God is still on the throne!

#### **4. Anticipate the joy of the final outcome**

The upright shall behold his face. **Psalm 11:7**

It's hard to imagine a greater incentive for pressing on in the pursuit of a righteous life than this: The upright shall behold his face. I'm going to see the face of God.

"How can you say to me, 'Flee like a bird to your mountain'?" Why do you think that when the foundations are destroyed there is nothing the righteous can do? I'm not giving up! In God I take refuge. God is on his throne. Whatever happens in this world, I'm going to behold his face.

There's a true story of a man by the name of William Montague Dyke. When William was ten years old, he was blinded in an accident. While he was in university, William fell in love with the daughter of a high ranking British naval officer, and they became engaged.

Shortly before the wedding, William had eye surgery in the hope that the operation would restore his sight. It was a one-time deal. If it failed, William would remain blind for the rest of his life.

Because it was only a short time away, William insisted on keeping the bandages that were on his face until the day of the wedding. If the surgery was successful, he wanted the first person he saw to be his new bride.

The wedding day arrived, and the guests assembled to witness the couple taking their vows. William's father, Sir William Hart Dyke, and the doctor who performed the surgery stood next to the groom, whose eyes were still covered with bandages.

The organ trumpeted the wedding march, and the bride walked down the aisle to the front of the church. As soon as she arrived at the altar, the surgeon whipped out a big pair of scissors and cut the bandages from William's eyes.

Imagine the tension in the room! The congregation held their breath, waiting to find out if William could see the woman who stood before him. As he stood face to face with his bride to be, William's words echoed throughout the cathedral, "You are more beautiful than I ever imagined." ii

Friend, one day you are going to behold the Lord's face. Having walked by faith, one day the bandages that cover our eyes will be removed. The upright shall behold his face! When you see his glory it will be greater than you ever imagined. And you will be so, so glad you persevered.

© Colin S. Smith

Permissions: You have permission and are encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format you choose, as long as you do not alter or change the wording in any way and do not charge a fee (beyond the cost of reproducing these materials). For posting on the web, a link to this document on our website ([www.UnlockingtheBible.org](http://www.UnlockingtheBible.org)) is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Unlocking the Bible, 1-866-865-6253.

**Please include this statement on every copy distributed:**

By Colin S. Smith. © Colin S. Smith. Website: [UnlockingtheBible.org](http://UnlockingtheBible.org)