

Psalm 86—Questions for Study and Reflection

This is another Psalm that seeks salvation from God (vv. 2, 16). The kind of salvation described is from danger and death, but are larger issues in it as well.

Psalm 86 is a Psalm of Lament, in which the writer pours out his troubles to God openly and honestly and asks for help. There are five components found in such Psalms, including an honest description of the trouble the writer is facing, addressing God directly, specific requests for God to help, reasons why God should help, and statements of trust or praise for God's help.

The first five questions invite you to read through the Psalm and find the ways it contains each of these five aspects of a Psalm of Lament. Then five more questions invite you to think and apply the five aspects of a Psalm of Lament to your own life and prayers.

1. What troubles was David having when he wrote this Psalm?
2. When David addresses God, what different words does he use for God (I found 3 but you have to read very closely; contact me if you can't find the third one)
3. What specific requests does he make of God? What is the essence of his request?
4. What "God-related" reasons does he mention for why God should help him?

What things about himself does he call attention to as reasons why God should help him?

5. What statements of faith does he make about whether God will help him? (In NIV these are in the past tense as if God had already done something. They could indeed refer to past situations when God helped him or they could refer to the current situation as confident statements that God will help.) In addition to trust, what else does he do in response to God's work (either his past work or expected work)(v. 12)?

6. What troubles are you facing in your life right now that you need to be saved from? Do you feel free to describe these openly and honestly to God like David did? Why or why not? (cf. #1)

7. Do you tend more often to tell your troubles to God or to people? What does that tell you about yourself? What word or words do you use most when you address God? Are different words appropriate at different times? (cf. #2)

8. You may have noticed that some of David's requests were directly related to his trouble (especially 2-4, 6, 16, 17) but at least one is broader than his current trouble (11). What is the significance of each line in v. 11? Why do you think he made this request? What can you learn from this about what we should pray when we are facing troubles? (cf. #3)

9. I found several God-related reasons why David thought his prayer should be answered, mostly pertaining to God's nature. Read vv. 5, 7b, 8, 10, 15 again and make sure you have written down all the qualities about God they contain. Can you think of an example in Scripture and then an example in your own experience of how God has displayed each of these qualities? I also found three self-related reasons why David thought God might answer him in vv. 2-4. Are these valid reasons for God to answer prayers? Do you exemplify these? What do you think "lift up my soul" means (v. 4). (cf. #4)

10. David responded to God with trust and thanksgiving (12, 13, 17). How do you respond to God *when* you make requests to him, *before* he has answered, and *after* he has answered? (cf. #5)

Spend time in prayer right now about whatever troubles you need to be saved from, guided by what you have learned about praying from this Psalm.