

Psalm 36
To the Chief Musician
A Psalm of David the servant of the LORD.

This psalm is titled **To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David the servant of the LORD.** Within the Book of Psalm only **Psalm 18** also uses the phrase **the servant of the LORD** in the title, and John Trapp observed that **Psalm 18** comes from David's old age. **Psalm 36** comes from a younger David; it is uncertain when, and upon what occasion, David penned this psalm, probably when he was struck at either by Saul or by Absalom; for in it he complains of the malice of his enemies against him, but triumphs in the goodness of God to him... From youth to old age, he was **David the servant of the LORD** and "He took more pleasure in the names of duty than of dignity." (John Trapp)

Psalm 36 NKJV

1An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked: *There is* no fear of God before his eyes.

2For he flatters himself in his own eyes, When he finds out his iniquity *and* when he hates.

3The words of his mouth *are* wickedness and deceit; He has ceased to be wise *and* to do good.

4He devises wickedness on his bed; He sets himself in a way *that is* not good; He does not abhor evil.

5Your mercy, O LORD, *is* in the heavens; Your faithfulness *reaches* to the clouds.

6Your righteousness *is* like the great mountains; Your judgments *are* a great deep; O LORD, You preserve man and beast.

7How precious *is* Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings.

8They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures.

9For with You *is* the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.

10Oh, continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You, And Your righteousness to the upright in heart.

11Let not the foot of pride come against me, And let not the hand of the wicked drive me away.

12There the workers of iniquity have fallen; They have been cast down and are not able to rise.

David ponders the reality of evil in God's world (verses 1-4), he then praises God's character (verses 5-9), and then he prays that God would protect him from evil and judge the wicked (10-12).

A. Revelation: The Corruption of the Human Heart (verses 1-4)

Psalm 36:1-4 is a snapshot of the fallen human heart, apart from God's grace in Jesus Christ. It unfolds a progression, showing that sin begins in the heart and expresses itself in words and deeds.

Verse 1a: “An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked”: In scripture, an **oracle** is usually an authoritative pronouncement from the Lord; David has an oracle or an utterance from the Lord; and it’s concerning transgression – sin. This oracle that’s about sin is directed to the wicked man – the individual who as a practice and way of life practices this sin. This oracle comes from the Lord, but it’s also coming through David.

Two points to be made about sin: **Sin can deceive us and sin can give us false assurance.**

- **Sin can deceive us:** (Romans 7:8-12NLT) ⁷ Well then, am I suggesting that the law of God is sinful? Of course not! In fact, it was the law that showed me my sin. I would never have known that coveting is wrong if the law had not said, “You must not covet.” ⁸ But sin used this command to arouse all kinds of covetous desires within me! If there were no law, sin would not have that power. ⁹ At one time I lived without understanding the law. But when I learned the command not to covet, for instance, the power of sin came to life, ¹⁰ and I died. So I discovered that the law’s commands, which were supposed to bring life, brought spiritual death instead. ¹¹ Sin took advantage of those commands and deceived me; it used the commands to kill me. ¹² But still, the law itself is holy, and its commands are holy and right and good.
- **Sin gives us false assurance that our rebellion will go unpunished** (Genesis 3:1-5)
¹The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the LORD God had made. One day he asked the woman, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?” ²“Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,” the woman replied. ³“It’s only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, ‘You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.’” ⁴“You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman. ⁵“God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”

Jeremiah 17:9-10, ⁹ “The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? ¹⁰ But I, the LORD, search all hearts and examine secret motives. I give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve.” The only hope for the sinful human heart is to be supernaturally changed.

Jeremiah 31:33 gives the solution. Where sin was once inscribed on the hearts of His people, God provides a new inscription: “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Jesus came to inaugurate a New Covenant so that sins could be forgiven and sinners could be **born again** (John 3:5, “Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit”). We cannot reform our hearts by our own effort. The only solution is for God to make our hearts new, washed clean from sin and fundamentally reoriented toward pleasing Him.

Verse 1b “There is no fear of God before his eyes”: This may be obvious but is often forgotten. The foundation of the **wicked** man’s character and deeds is a lack of the **fear of God**. He does not respect or reverence God as he should. Paul quotes in Romans 3:18 “They have no fear of God at all.”

Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline”. The wicked are very foolish, because they do not fear God. Notice that it is to David’s heart the sins of these wicked are speaking. He knows in his heart that there is no fear of God within them, or they would not be committing these sins (transgressions).

In the beginning of this chapter David says he is the servant of the Lord. We should also, realize our position with God. We are servants of the Most High God. Each one of us preach a sermon to the world, each day of our lives, by the way we conduct our lives. These transgressors have sent a very bad message out to those who look on. Those who love and fear God try to live as near like Jesus as they can.

Verse 2 “For he flatters himself in his own eyes, When he finds out his iniquity and when he hates.”

He flatters himself so much that he is unable to understand enough to hate his own iniquity. The wicked man isn’t just misrepresenting himself to others. Others aren’t even in view yet here in David’s oracle. The wicked man deceives his own self about his own nature. The wicked man speaks lies to himself. He flatters himself in his own eyes. Even though the wicked man is able to trick himself into thinking he’s fine, he really can’t deceive others indefinitely.

“In their own eyes they flatter themselves too much *to detect or hate their sin*” (36:2 NIV).

This is where ‘others’ come in to the picture. He’s been flattering himself in his own eyes. He’s been able to make himself look better to himself than he really is. However, who is not tricked by his self-flattery? The ‘others’ are not tricked; at least not indefinitely.

We see a man full of conceit. He is great in his own sight. The world sees him with totally different eyes. His sin will find him out. Those who he sinned against will hate him.

Proverbs 16:5 New Living Translation

The LORD detests the proud; they will surely be punished.

Proverbs 16:5 The Message Bible

God can’t stomach arrogance or pretense; believe me, he’ll put those braggarts in their place.

Verse 3 “The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit; He has ceased to be wise and to do good”.

Verse 3a “The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit”: His mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, of filthy and unchaste words; corrupt communication, lying, deceit, and flattery. Out of the abundance of the wickedness of his heart his mouth speaks. What the wicked speaks is a lying sin – deceptive sin; sin that isn’t always brash and bold and in your face. He needs to make the sin look good sometimes for others to embrace it. His words are sin – and deceitful.

Psalm 10:7 New Living Translation

Their mouths are full of cursing, lies, and threats. Trouble and evil are on the tips of their tongues.

Verse 3b “He has ceased to be wise and to do good”: He is pictured as not living in a wise manner. He doesn’t care about that anymore. With the phrase **“ceased to be wise”** it makes it sound as if this man had at one point been wise. He was engaged in living wisely at one point – at least to some degree. But now this man has just completely quit living according to God’s wisdom altogether. When you abandon God’s wisdom – as the wicked man does – then there’s ultimately no reason for doing good. That’s why the wicked man ceases to do good also.

Psalm 94:8 New Living Translation

Think again, you fools! When will you finally catch on?

Jeremiah 4:22 New Living Translation

My people are foolish and do not know me,” says the Lord. “They are stupid children who have no understanding. They are clever enough at doing wrong, but they have no idea how to do right!

The words that come from our mouth will match the thoughts we have in our heart. This man uses his evil tongue to cheat and deceive. His every thought is how to get the best of someone else. It really doesn’t matter to him, what is right to do. He does only the things that will benefit him.

Verse 4 “He devises wickedness on his bed; He sets himself in a way that is not good; He does not abhor evil.

Verse 4a “He devises wickedness on his bed”: In the night, when he should be in innocent slumber, he lies awake, devising wicked schemes against others. The bed is a place of rest, but not for the wicked. There is no rest for the wicked.

Proverbs 4:16 New Living Translation

“For evil people can’t sleep until they’ve done their evil deed for the day. They can’t rest until they’ve caused someone to stumble”.

Micah 2:1 New Living Translation

“What sorrow awaits you who lie awake at night, thinking up evil plans. You rise at dawn and hurry to carry them out, simply because you have the power to do so”.

Verse 4b “He sets himself in a way that is not good”: In an evil way, which he chooses and delights in, and determines to continue in. He left the paths of righteousness to walk in the ways of darkness. He sets or stands himself in a bad way.

Isaiah 65:2 Living Bible

But my own people—though I have been spreading out my arms to welcome them all day long—have rebelled; they follow their own evil paths and thoughts.

Verse 4c “He does not abhor (dislike, hate) evil.” When you abhor something, you basically reject it. What David is saying here in this verse is that there is no evil that the wicked man rejects. He’ll never turn down any sort of evil. He will embrace it all.

Romans 12:9 New International Version

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

But on the contrary, he loves evil and takes pleasure in doing it, and in them that commit it. Even when he is supposedly resting in bed, his evil mind and heart are plotting his moves for the next day

David has lamented that there is no respect or reverence toward the Lord in the eyes of fallen man, whose heart is filled with deceit and who boasts in his own wickedness. David grieves that sinful man has ceased to be wise and good. Rather, he devises wicked plans, sets his face against that which is good, and does not abhor evil.

B. Adoration: The Character of God’s Heart (verses 5-9)

David stops contemplating the sinners and starts focusing on the glories of the Lord. Knowing the character of God is essential to a balanced Christian life. David is not just meditating on what God is like. He’s actually speaking directly to God about what He’s like. David in this section refers to God directly no less than a dozen times. He’s praying to God – communicating back to God.

Verse 5 “Your mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds” (NKJV).

“Your love, O Lord reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies” (NIV).

Verse 5a “Your mercy (love), O LORD, is in the heavens”: The first attribute is His *mercy*. That’s the Hebrew word *chesed*. That’s God’s loyal covenant love. It’s the devotion he extended to the nation of Israel that He didn’t show to others who weren’t in covenant with him. This mercy is in the heavens; it’s describing both the unchangeableness and the abundance of that love.

Verse 5b “Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds (skies)”: The second attribute is God’s *faithfulness*. He does not lie. He does not go back on promises – and in the context of covenant/promised love – he does not withdraw his covenant love from those whom He’s set it upon. This faithfulness reaches unto the clouds. Again, you get this picture of this attribute of God towering high into the sky. It’s immense. It fills the earth! God’s “faithfulness” means that He always keeps His promises. He is consistent, never changing. By saying that God’s mercy (love) extends to the heavens and His faithfulness to the skies, David means that these qualities are immense or inexhaustible. We can keep coming to Him for more of His love and He never runs out of it! Oh how He loves us! How He loves us so!

Verse 6, “Your righteousness is like the great mountains; Your judgments are a great deep; O LORD, You preserve man and beast.

Verse 6a, “Your righteousness is like the great mountains”: God’s standards are impressive and immovable, because they stem from His holy character. He keeps all of His promises and fulfills all His requirements. God keeps His covenant promises with His people. The righteousness of God is unshakeable. It is higher than we can imagine.

Verse 6b, “Your judgments are a great deep”: This text refers to God’s divine authority of His creation and His Justice. By saying that God’s judgments are like a *great deep*, he means that they are unfathomable. God’s ways are not our ways. We cannot understand all that He does or why He does it. We cannot understand many of the trials that He brings into our lives. God is righteous – He is just – he does right constantly and consistently.

Job 11:7-9 New International Version

7 Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?

8 They are higher than the heavens above—what can you do? They are deeper than the depths below—what can you know?

9 Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea.

Verse 6c “O LORD, You preserve man and beast”: God takes care of animals; surely He will care for our needs.

Matthew 6:26 New International Version

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

Verse 7 “How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings.”

7a. “How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God”: Considering the care of God for His people and His creation, David felt the mercy of God to be a precious and personal thing.

Psalm 36:7 New International Version

“How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!” We cannot put a price on the love of our God that is unconditional, true, and unfailing.

Psalm 36:7 King James Version

“How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God!” The word excellent is the same word used in Scripture to refer to the precious stone that was in the crown placed on David’s head in 2 Samuel 12:30. God’s loyal covenant love is like a precious, rare, unique jewel. To find it, is to find something far better than any perishable stone in this life.

Verse 7b “Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings”: The merciful God is a place of rest and protection for the people of God. God invites all among the children of men to find this refuge of trust in Him.

Psalm 17:8 New Living Translation

“Guard me as you would guard your own eyes. Hide me in the shadow of your wings.”

There are two main ways that commentators understand the figure shadow of Your wings. Some take it to mean the wings of the cherubim represented in His tabernacle and then later the temple. Cherubim wings were depicted on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, which was the representation of God’s throne. Others take it in the sense that a hen covers her young chicks under her wings to protect, hide, and shelter them.

The lovingkindness of God is what sent His only son Jesus Christ to the earth and eventually to the cross to save each one of us.

John 15:13 New International Version

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”.

Verse 8 “They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures”.

Verse 8a “They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house”: God cares for and protects those who trust in Him as a gracious and honorable host would for anyone in his house. The fullness of God’s house is enough to satisfy anyone, offering a virtual river of...pleasures in Him.

Psalm 65:4 New International Version

Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple.

Verse 8b “The river of Your pleasures”: To appreciate the river metaphor, you have to remember that David was writing to people who lived in a desert. For them, a flowing river was especially wonderful. It meant life and refreshment. You could have all that you needed to drink. You could cool off by bathing in it. You could irrigate your crops with it.

Verse 9 “For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light”.

The satisfaction and pleasures found in God are connected to life and light. They heal and build, giving life; they are full of the light of truth and goodness.

Fountain – that produces not merely literal physical water – but God’s fountain sends out life. Of course, without water for a while, life starts to dwindle on this earth. So the two ideas are related. No life without water. God has sent to David and the people of his day both water and an ability to keep living. See the following verse if we chose to abandon the fountain of living water, meaning our source, God:

Jeremiah 2:13 New Living Translation

“For my people have done two evil things: They have abandoned me—the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!” This is a nation that instead of obeying God placed their faith in false gods that were made out material that could easily crack and therefore not hold any water. The fountain of life suggests an unending supply. He never runs dry!

Seeing light in God’s light - Several times in the Old Testament, “seeing light” is a metaphor for living; God is the source of physical life and also of spiritual life. The Lord is the Source and Sustainer of all light and life. Jesus is also, the light of the world. If we have Jesus in us, we have life and Light.

1 Peter 2:9 New Living Translation

“But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

C. Expectation: The Confidence of the Believer’s Heart (verses 10-12)

What a privilege it is to be God’s children! We are resting safely under His wings, feasting joyfully at His table, drinking abundantly from His River, and walking confidently in His light! In response to these blessings David prayed that the Lord would continue His blessings on His people (verse 10) and one day judge the wicked (verses 11-12).

David knew that the enemy was subtle and that he dared not become overconfident, so he prayed for the Lord's protection from their hands and feet. He did not want to be knocked down and trampled upon and forced to leave his own land. By faith, David looked ahead and saw the enemies of the Lord completely defeated, and on this confidence, he continued to serve the Lord.

Verse 10 “Oh, continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You, And Your righteousness to the upright in heart”.

Verse 10a “Continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You: Having received the good mercy and righteousness of God, David rightly prays that it would continue for himself and all those who know God in right relationship. Even though we who have come to know God through Jesus Christ have experienced His grace and love, we need a continuing, steady flow of it. Even though He has promised it (Rom. 8:35-39), we still need to ask Him for it.

Romans 8:35-39 The Message

“So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose? If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn't gladly and freely do for us? And who would dare tangle with God by messing with one of God's chosen? Who would dare even to point a finger? The One who died for us—who was raised to life for us!—is in the presence of God at this very moment sticking up for us. Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture:

*They kill us in cold blood because they hate you.
We're sitting ducks; they pick us off one by one.*

None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us”.

Verse 10b “Continue Your righteousness to the upright in heart”: We might think, “If they're already upright in heart, why do they need more righteousness?” But we are never fully sanctified in this life. We will not be completely like Jesus until the moment that we see Him face to face (1 John 3:2-3). And so we must continue to ask God to give us His righteousness. Also, this isn't just outward behavior, but uprightness of heart. We need to seek God for a pure heart, or thought life.

1 John 3:2-3 The Message

“But friends, that’s exactly who we are: children of God. And that’s only the beginning. Who knows how we’ll end up! What we know is that when Christ is openly revealed, we’ll see him—and in seeing him, become like him. All of us who look forward to his Coming stay ready, with the glistening purity of Jesus’ life as a model for our own”.

Verse 11 “Let not the foot of pride come against me, And let not the hand of the wicked drive me away”.

David asks that the Lord protect him from the proud and wicked, who would try to bring him down to their level. Evil people feel convicted by righteous people. So they want to see the righteous fall so that they can justify their own sin.

David earlier praised God as the one who protects and blesses His people (Psalm 36:7). Now David prayed that God would fulfill this aspect of His character, protecting His servant against both the foot and the hand of the wicked.

Verse 12 “There the workers of iniquity have fallen; They have been cast down and are not able to rise”.

In the final verse, David prophetically looks ahead and sees the place where the wicked meet their final demise. David is so confident of God’s righteousness and justice that he sees this yet-future event as if it has already happened. God will surely judge the wicked.

This Psalm ends with a positive note of confidence from David. He says, my enemies who were workers of iniquity have fallen, and they will not be able to come against me again. This is David’s way of thanking God for the defeat of the evil ones.

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