

What is a Blameless Life?

Psalm 26 (and 25)

Turn to Psalm 26 please. Psalm 26 encourages us to ask God for help and to rescue us, because we have been faithful to him and have led a blameless life. I will say this in different words, to be clear. Because we have been faithful to God, and loyal to him, we want him to return the favour. We ask him to show the same to us, and to deliver us, because of our blameless life.

Usually in the psalms, we ask for help based on God's character. Because he is faithful and loving, would he please help us. In Psalm 26, we ask for help based on our character. We have honoured him and served him, so we think he should help us.

Most of this psalm tells God how we have led a blameless life. We spell out to God how we have honoured him. In this psalm we tell God four important things about ourselves to persuade him that we live right. We invite him to check it out and see for himself that these things are true.

In this congregation, most of us could claim those four expressions of our faithfulness. And yet we are generally reluctant to pray this way. So we will go through the psalm, and then we'll talk about why we might be reluctant to do what this psalm urges us to do.

- 1 Vindicate me, LORD, for I have led a blameless life;
I have trusted in the LORD and have not faltered.*
- 2 Test me, LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind;*
- 3 for I have always been mindful of your unfailing love
and have lived in reliance on your faithfulness.*
- 4 I do not sit with the deceitful, nor do I associate with hypocrites.*
- 5 I abhor the congregation of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked.*
- 6 I wash my hands in innocence, and go about your altar, LORD,*
- 7 proclaiming aloud your praise and telling of all your wonderful deeds.*
- 8 LORD, I love the house where you live, the place where your glory dwells.*
- 9 Do not take away my soul along with sinners, my life with those who are bloodthirsty,*
- 10 in whose hands are wicked schemes, whose right hands are full of bribes.*
- 11 I lead a blameless life; deliver me and be merciful to me.*
- 12 My feet stand on level ground; in the great congregation I will praise the LORD.*

1 My Blameless Life – 26:1a, 11

Here's how the psalm opens: *Vindicate me, LORD, for I have led a blameless life.* And here is how it ends: *I lead a blameless life; deliver me and be merciful to me.* "Vindicate me" means "judge in my favour, show me your favour, make it clear that you're on my side." We should put these together: "Vindicate me" and "deliver me" and "be merciful to me."

So we want some kind of help from God, but what kind of help is not clear. This psalm works for any kind of help from God. The emphasis in Psalm 26 is on why God should help us.

First Reason: I Keep Depending on You – 26:1b–3

*I have trusted in the LORD and have not faltered.
Test me, LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind;
for I have always been mindful of your unfailing love
and have lived in reliance on your faithfulness.*

Do you turn to God when you need help? Pray when you're desperate? Do you remind yourself of God's unfailing love, and count on his faithfulness? "Test me and see, God, you're the one I trust, you're the one I depend on. I keep turning to you." That's part one of a blameless life.

Second Reason: I Avoid Gatherings of Evil People – 26:4–5

*I do not sit with the deceitful, nor do I associate with hypocrites.
I abhor the congregation of evildoers, and refuse to sit with the wicked.*

The blameless person has chosen to avoid people who ignore or defy God. They don't want the company of deceitful and wicked people. We will certainly meet these people, and we always treat them people with respect and courtesy. But we don't associate with them or sit with them. We want nothing to do with their gatherings.

Here's how the New Testament says it: "*We are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.'*" Therefore, '*Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord.*'" 2 Corinthians 6:16–17.

The blameless person trusts in God and counts on God's unfailing love. The blameless person does not partner with people whose lives defy God. This is how you people live. There's much of that in this room.

Third Reason: I Worship You with Your People – 26:6–8

*I wash my hands in innocence, and go about your altar, LORD, proclaiming aloud your praise
and telling of all your wonderful deeds. LORD, I love the house where you live, the place where
your glory dwells. See also the last line: In the great congregation I will praise the LORD.*

This is a group setting. Verses 4–5 describe the evildoers whose congregation the blameless person avoids, and verses 6–8 describe the alternative. When we pray this psalm, we are not alone. We praise God among his people.

There are two congregations in this psalm. In verse 5 we say, “*I abhor the congregation of evildoers,*” and in verse 12 we say “*in the great congregation I will praise the LORD.*” It is the same Hebrew word in both cases, *qahal*. Most translations have a different word in v12 than in v5, and that’s too bad. (ESV and good old KJV got it right.) The point is that there are two different congregations. The blameless people avoid one and join the other. “I worship you with your people.”

For New Testament believers, the local church is the temple, the house of God. *Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? ... God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.* 1 Corinthians 3:16.

Fourth Reason: I Don’t Live like Evil People – 26:9–10

In verses 4–5 we say, “God, I avoid evil congregations,” and here we say, “I avoid evil actions.”

Do not take away my soul along with sinners, my life with those who are bloodthirsty, in whose hands are wicked schemes, whose right hands are full of bribes. The sinners here are those who are bloodthirsty. They make plans to do evil. Their right hands are full of bribes, which means they are always ready to pay money to avoid justice.

“God, don’t treat me like those people, because I don’t act like that. I lead a blameless life, so deliver me and be merciful to me.”

Here are the four again: 1, I keep depending on you, God. 2, I avoid gatherings of evil people. 3, I worship you in your house with your people. 4, I don’t live like evil people. In this psalm, these are the four ingredients a blameless life.

God is inviting us to come to him like this. He’s speaking to us. He’s telling us to use these four as reasons why he should help us when we need his help. It is God’s idea that we would talk to him like this. Most faithful Israelites could talk to him like this, and they did. And most of us can talk to him like this as well. Let’s do that.

My Blameless Life: A Bit of Church History, and the Introspective Conscience of the West

We have trouble telling God about our blameless lives. Here is at least part of the reason for that. Something happened in the Christian church around the year 600, 600 plus or minus 100 years. Around that time, Christians started to fear God’s anger at their sins. We Christians began to feel the weight of our imperfect lives, the burden of our ongoing failures.

We became anxious about God judging us. We began to feel his displeasure at the things we can not get right in our lives. It became a big problem. How can we put our trust in a God who’s almost always upset with us? How can we count on his loving kindness when we’re pretty sure he’s actually angry at us and getting ready to punish us?

We all know about this. For some of us, the biggest challenge of the Christian life is how to trust and serve a God that you're sure is mostly just disappointed in you.

Your average faithful Israelite in Old Testament times did not know anything about this. The average faithful believer in New Testament times, and for several hundred years afterward, did not know anything about this. Those people were not better than we are. We can tell that from reading the Bible.

But they were not plagued by the introspective conscience of western European civilisation, and they did not worry about God's judgement. In the early church, if you were worried about God's judgement, then you became a Christian. You trusted in Christ and were baptized and you worshipped with other believers, and in that way you were rescued from coming judgement. But somewhere in the first thousand years of the church, that changed. Believers feared God's anger.

In the 1500s, Martin Luther found his answer in Romans and Galatians. We were saved by our faith in Christ, not by works of law, but by God's grace. Luther was right about salvation by grace. But Paul did not write Romans and Galatians to rescue the guilty conscience of believers. They didn't have that. Paul wrote to explain how Christ brings Jews and Gentiles together in one body of Christ.

We've all been taught what Luther found in Romans and Galatians. But the problem does not quickly go away, does it. And just for the record, this is wide problem. It is not any one denomination. It is Catholics and Protestants alike. Scripture includes an urgent call to holy living, and when churches call people that way, as they should, this sad fear often shows up.

Satan is at the root of this, my brothers and sisters. Jesus called him the liar, and the father of lies. John 8. Revelation says he is the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them day and night. Revelation 12. The accuser is determined that you will not find joy and relief in this psalm. Expect it. It has probably already happened.

My Blameless Life in Psalm 25

Psalm 25 ends much as Psalm 26 begins, counting on God to take care of us because of our godly lives. Psalm 25:21 says, *May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope, LORD, is in you.* God, I am safe with you, because of my godly life. That's much like what we saw in Psalm 26.

The word "integrity" in 25:21 and the word "blameless" twice in Psalm 26 are the same Hebrew word, *tōm*. It means complete, pure, blameless. In both psalms, we tell God that we are the kind of people that he helps and delivers. Quite possibly Psalm 26 was put right after Psalm 25 because Psalm 26 began the same way Psalm 25 ended.

We already saw four characteristics of a blameless life in Psalm 26. Let's take a brief tour of Psalm 25 to fill out our blameless lives.

Psalm 25:7 *Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, LORD, are good.* Psalm 25 confesses sin three times, this is the first. So a blameless life is not a sinless life. A blameless person talks to God like this about their sins. Handling sin like this is part of a blameless life.

Psalm 25:8 *Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.* Verse 12: *Who, then, are those who fear the LORD? He will instruct them in the ways they should choose.* God instructs sinners in his ways, and he instructs those who fear God in his ways.

David, who composes this psalm, is talking about himself both times. He sins and needs forgiveness, and he is also someone who fears the LORD. In Psalm 25 there is no tension between being a sinner who needs forgiveness, and being someone who fears the LORD.

Psalm 25:10 *All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of his covenant.* Again, David speaks about himself. God will be good to him, because he keeps the demands of God's covenant with Israel.

Very next verse, 25:11 *For the sake of your name, LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.* Keeping the demands of the covenant can go together with great iniquity. How can that be? Because when there is iniquity, this is how covenant people speak to God. Verse 11 is the second time Psalm 25 confesses sin.

In 25:18 he confesses sin the third time: *"Look on my affliction and my distress, and take away all my sins."* In that section of Psalm 25, his sins are just one of several troubles he needs help with.

And then verse 21 sums it all up: *May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope, LORD, is in you.* Another translation says, *May my goodness and honesty preserve me, because I trust in you.*

To summarize, Psalm 25 is full of trusting God, beginning to end. Three times in this psalm we confess sin to God, including rebellious ways, and great iniquities. In this psalm, we are also those who fear the LORD and those who keep the demands of his covenant. Fearing the LORD *includes* confessing our sins and rebellions and iniquities. Keeping the demands of his covenant *includes* confessing sins and rebellions and iniquities.

In Psalm 25, there is no concern at all about God's anger or displeasure. This is all a part of a faithful covenant life of fearing God. And we end, *May my goodness and honesty preserve me, because I trust in you.* So when Psalm 26 begins and ends with my blameless life, we are not talking about a sinless or perfect life.

We are talking about the blamelessness of Psalm 25, where we confess sin regularly and completely trust in God's care and protection. Psalm 25 lays out in detail the blamelessness of Psalm 26. Psalm 25 and 26 are psalms of David, but they are not here only because they are psalms of David. They are here because God wanted his children through the ages to come to him like this.

God is telling us what a blameless life is, and what it is like when we fear him and keep his covenant. God wants us to enjoy being his children.

“May my goodness and honesty preserve me, LORD, because I trust in you.” “Show me your favour, LORD, for I have led a blameless life.” “I lead a blameless life; deliver me and be merciful to me.” Amen.

PRAYER: God our Father, thank you for all the Scriptures that are good news for us. Thank you for what Psalms 25 and 26 tell us about a life that pleases you. Thank you for encouraging us today. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.