

CALL OF THE CHILD

PSALM 141 OCTOBER 4, 2020

The National Emergency Number Association estimates that 240 million calls are made to 911 each year.¹ They suggest a few ‘best practices’ whenever calling 911:

1. Make the call in “any serious situation where a law enforcement officer, fire fighter or emergency medical help is needed right away. If you are unsure of whether your situation is an emergency, go ahead and call 911.”
2. If you call 911 by mistake, do not hang up the phone. Stay on the line until you can tell a dispatcher there’s no emergency.
3. Do your best to stay calm and answer all questions.
4. Know the location of your emergency
5. Teach your kids how to call 911.

These ‘best practices’ are common sense, but that doesn’t stop some folks from making some spectacularly ridiculous calls.

Dispatchers have reported the following *real* calls they’ve received:

That the neighbor’s sprinkler was on and it was getting *their* lawn wet.²

Wanting to know why traffic is so bad.³

To report a laundromat washing machine that didn’t have enough water.

That a hotel parking space was too small.

And, finally, to report a huge fire that had just broken out on top of a hill and was spreading rapidly. The caller grew more panicked, saying “it’s getting bigger! The whole top of the hill is on fire now! Doesn’t anybody else see this?! It’s lighting up the sky around it...it’s huge!” It was the sun rising.⁴

In Psalm 141 David makes an emergency call to his Savior. We’re not sure what was going on but we can see that he feared for his very life. In fact, looking at the situation it seems he felt like he was as good as dead. But, before the final blow fell, he cried out to God and with what breath he had left he said, “Lord, *save me...from becoming unspiritual!*” Surrounded by enemies who had laid traps for him, David’s *first* concern was his own heart and relationship with God. He wanted to be rescued but he wanted *first* to be sure his life was in harmony with the Lord. A life that pleased Him and honored Him. Even in this grave danger, David knew that, in the end, all would be right thanks to God’s holy power and that changed the way he thought about and reacted to suffering, difficulty, crisis. It made for an unusual 911 call, but far from being ridiculous, we can see it as wonderful and instructive.

We are living in a time of local, national and global crisis. There are serious troubles of all sorts that are pressing in on many sides. We see multitudes of people gathering for prayer at our capitols and

¹ <https://www.hsi.com/blog/appreciating-911-call-takers-by-following-best-practices-for-emergency-calls>

² <https://thoughtcatalog.com/lorenzo-jensen-iii/2017/02/36-of-the-most-ridiculous-911-calls-in-the-history-of-the-universe/>

³ <https://bc.ctvnews.ca/these-were-the-top-10-most-ridiculous-911-calls-in-b-c-in-2019-1.4747483>

⁴ <https://www.boredpanda.com/operators-share-most-ridiculous-911-calls>

city centers. Many of us feel anxious and distressed. In a time like that, how might we pray? How should we *think* as Christians who are lovingly held in the hands of the Savior?

Psalm 141 shows a way. One not very intuitive to the human mind and not always *easy* to apply, but profitable to us for life and Godliness. A way that draws us nearer to God in love and trust.

It begins above verse 1:

Psalm 141:1 - A psalm of David. ¹Lord, I call on you; hurry to help me. Listen to my voice when I call on you.

David just told the Maker of heaven and earth to “hurry up.” In polite society there aren’t *many* situations where you can say that to someone. If you say that to your waiter, you might get an unwanted addition to your meal. Do it in your car and you might find yourself in a road rage incident. In fact, Russell Crowe’s latest movie is about how he’s at a stop light, someone honks at him when the light turns green and he spends the rest of the movie terrorizing them.⁵

There are times, of course, when “hurry up” is not only acceptable, but necessary. We’ve already talked about calling 911, but think of a small child trying to cross the monkey bars, getting a few rungs in and they realize they’re not going to make it. They don’t have the strength in themselves to hang on *or* go forward, what do they do? They call out for mom or dad to hurry and save them.

If you’re a Christian, remember that God is your *Father*. Full of love and compassion for you. He is mindful of the struggles you’re facing. His eyes are on you. And He’s ready to hear your calls for help. Cast your cares upon Him, for He cares for you and will sustain you. He is a God who hears.

David’s words raise an important question: Does God listen to the prayers of unbelievers? The answer isn’t quite as simple as “yes” or “no.” Obviously, God is omnipotent and omnipresent. Nothing is hidden from him. The Bible says that our thoughts are known from afar. Everything is laid bare before His eyes.⁶ And it’s clear He will hear *anyone* who calls out to Him for salvation. We also see examples like Cornelius in the Bible. *His* prayers were heard before he was born again.

However, there are also some significant warnings to those who are not His children. In Psalm 34 we’re told God turns His face *against* those who do evil. Proverbs 21 says those who shut their ears to the cries of the poor will be ignored in their own time of need.

In Isaiah we read:

Isaiah 59:2 - It’s your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore.

If you’re an unbeliever, you are in a much more dangerous and precarious situation than David, *who was close to assassination!* You need to call out to God for mercy and forgiveness, turning from your sin so that you can be saved and brought into God’s family. All who call on the name of the Lord *will* be saved, but until then you are in a desperate position.

⁵ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unhinged_\(2020_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unhinged_(2020_film))

⁶ Hebrews 4:13

Psalm 141:2 - ²May my prayer be set before you as incense, the raising of my hands as the evening offering.

So here we have David, in desperate need, we'll learn in verse 8 he's afraid for his life. He takes a moment to call out to God and here's his request: God help me...*to worship and pray*. David was tremendously busy in life. He was king, he was a poet. He was an instrument builder. He was a warrior. He did administration, he planned worship services. But here we catch a glimpse into why he was a man "after God's own heart." He kept his spiritual life at the forefront of his mind. It was at the *top* of his concerns list. Now, he had quite a list. Aside from regular family concerns and interpersonal things going on like all of us, he's got to keep the Philistines in mind. And the Ammonites. He's trying to figure out how he can build the world's greatest Temple in Jerusalem. He's putting together a catalog of worship songs for an entire nation to sing. But, in this emergency call, he doesn't simply want things *from* God, his desire is to have a heart and life a life that *pleases* God.

To David, worship mattered. Prayer mattered. They were dominant elements of his life. The prayers he offered were as meaningful as the prescribed incense that was burned in the Tabernacle. And the raising of his hands in surrender and worship as significant as the sacrifice of a lamb on the altar. That's not just *David's* way of thinking about things, but God's as well. In Revelation 5:8 we read that, in heaven there are "gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of God's people." Jesus said in John 4 that God is *looking* for people who will worship Him in spirit and in truth.

We also note here that David felt that he had a personal responsibility to God no matter what the circumstances of his life were. Whether in smooth sailing or shipwrecked, you and I are called to live in the presence of God, worshiping Him, not just in some theoretical, abstract way, but *actually* worshiping, actually praying. Actually pouring out our hearts and lives in praise to Him.

Psalm 141:3 - ³Lord, set up a guard for my mouth; keep watch at the door of my lips.

David's first request is: God help me worship. His second is: God, help me control my tongue. He felt the tongue needed to be leashed and guarded. The Bible speaks a lot to us about the tongue. It's the most powerful muscle in your body. It can save a life or set the world on fire. God directs us about what kinds of words we use and the motivation behind them. Why does it matter so much?

For one thing, Proverbs explains that "life and death are in the power of the tongue." But also, as Christians we are appointed as ambassadors for Jesus Christ. You represent Him. You carry out actions for Him. You connect to others as His body here on the earth. Imagine there being an ambassador, sent out in wartime to negotiate peace, but he's drunk as a skunk. Do you *really* want him talking? Boris Yeltsin was famous for inebriation. At one point during the Clinton Administration he called our president, drunk, and asked Bill to set up a secret meeting on a submarine.⁷

Our lips need guarding. Our physical lips as well as our *digital* ones. You may have a truth to share but if it is done without love, you might as well be a clanging cymbal. It's valueless, even *detrimental* to the cause of Christ to be lashing people with your words and not speaking in love, compassion and the kind of mercy that God shows sinners like us.

Psalm 141:4 - ⁴Do not let my heart turn to any evil thing or perform wicked acts with evildoers. Do not let me feast on their delicacies.

⁷ <https://www.history.com/news/bill-clinton-boris-yeltsin-drunk-1994-russian-state-visit>

David started thinking about the acts of worship, then his words, now he delves deeper into himself and takes a look at his very heart. He understood that it is from the heart that words are formed, actions taken, desires unleashed.

He also understood that just because you're being offered something sumptuous and desirable doesn't mean it isn't being offered by an enemy. Sin may be pleasurable for a time, an easy road to take, but it brings forth death. Death in the heart and death in the life.

Psalm 141:5 - ⁵Let the righteous one strike me—it is an act of faithful love; let him rebuke me — it is oil for my head; let me not refuse it. Even now my prayer is against the evil acts of the wicked.

Discipline and rebuke are not fun things. They're no fun to give and no fun to receive. But David, having *God's* perspective on things, saw them as an act of loving, medicinal correction.

God does not want His people to feel ashamed and condemned when they make a mistake, but He *does* want to correct us and fortify us and prepare us as He continues to conform us into the image of His Son. Here's one way to think of it: If you want to be a boxer you're going to do a lot of training and preparing, but at *some point* you're going to have to get in the ring and spar. And in that process, poor form and bad habits can be *corrected* by you getting punched. When that happens, your sparring partner isn't trying to *hurt* you, he's trying to *help* you - to teach you how to keep your hands up. To teach you to prepare for the *real* blows that will be coming from the champ someday.

Don't get me wrong, God doesn't ever abuse us or slap us around. But David here says, "Getting rebuked is like getting hit in the face." But with a Godly mindset he was able to see how beneficial and necessary it was. And David was a man who experienced some *real* rebukes in his time.

Here is a New Testament command for Christians:

Galatians 6:1 - Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself.

It's not easy to rebuke fellow Christians. It wouldn't have been easy to rebuke David. But thank God for those who did. Because it was those moments of correction that brought him back from the brink of disaster.

David would rather have discipline than deterioration in his spiritual life. "No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living."

Psalm 141:6 - ⁶When their rulers will be thrown off the sides of a cliff, the people will listen to my words, for they are pleasing.

Scholars point out that the Hebrew in this section of the Psalm is very challenging. There's not much consensus about how exactly verses 6 and 7 should be rendered. But we can see that David was able to look *beyond* his present trouble and remember what is coming in the future. One day, good will totally triumph over evil. We can be of good cheer right now because Jesus Christ has overcome

the world, He has conquered sin and death, but still those enemies fight against us. But there is a day coming when all will be made right and those who rejected God *will* be repaid for their choices.

In your Bible you may see a note that the words can read this way: “Their judges [will] fall into the hands of the Rock.” That Rock is Christ. He invites anyone who is willing to anchor themselves to Him and be saved from the coming destruction. But all others will be crushed in judgment. This ultimate fate of the wicked is just and is good, but we shouldn’t be excited that they will suffer such a fate. The Bible says that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

This comes back to guarding our tongues. It’s easy and popular for us to speak about our hatred of certain leaders or prominent people *because* of their wickedness and their refusal to do what is right. It’s true, judgment is coming. But that should propel us to *evangelize*, not gloat. Gore Vidal, the famous author once wrote, “The four most beautiful words in our common language [are]: ‘I told you so.’”⁸ That’s *never* to be our feeling. As Christians, the 4 most beautiful words we can say are: Jesus can save you. Whether that ‘you’ is a friend, an enemy, a prince or a pauper.

Think of the little servant girl in 2 Kings 5, stolen from her home in Israel. Trafficked into slavery into the house of the commander of the Aramean army. His name was Naaman. He was a chief enemy of God’s people. And he was a leper. That little girl had such grace and compassion that she told him a secret that would change his life forever: My God can *heal* you of your leprosy. The text says the girl thought, “I *wish* my master would go see the prophet.” That’s grace. That’s the love of Christ.

Psalm 141:7 - ⁷As when one plows and breaks up the soil, turning up rocks, so our bones have been scattered at the mouth of Sheol.

Some translators believe this is a quote from the conquered unbelievers in the end. Others take it as David’s emotional feeling at the time. There’s a devotional thought for us either way.

If you’re not a Christian, this Psalm reveals that there is a day of reckoning coming. One of the ways the Bible describes it is God *reaping* the earth. If you will not accept Christ as Savior then you will be loaded like a cluster of grapes into the winepress of God’s wrath and you will die in your sins and suffer the eternal penalty for them. You will be devoured by the grave and no one can save you except Jesus. But He’s *ready* to save you. He *died* to save you. And if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you *will* be saved.

But what if it was *David* feeling this way in verse 7? David was no stranger to hard times. This image of rocks and bones remind us of some important truths that concern God’s children. First, no matter what happens, death has *no claim* on you. You may suffer, you may die, but you will be made alive again. Because Jesus rose we will rise. Second, you may *feel* in life as if you’re a rock in the dirt. As if you’re living out that scene in *The Great Pumpkin* where Charlie Brown goes to house after house and instead of candy all he gets are rocks in his pillowcase. But you are not a worthless rock in the dirt. You are a precious child of God. You are planted like a *tree*, which grows and brings forth fruit. You are of great, eternal value in the eyes of the Creator and He will not waste your life.

Psalm 141:8 - ⁸But my eyes look to you, Lord, my Lord. I seek refuge in you; do not let me die.

⁸ <https://www.orbooks.com/catalog/i-told-you-so/>

In all circumstances, not least in times of fear and hurt, we must look to the Lord. Notice, David doesn't just speak abstractly or generically. He calls Him *my* Lord. Is He *your* Lord? What does it mean to make Him *yours*? It means you have made Him your refuge. God is not just some sort of cosmic underwriter that approves your insurance plan or funds a heavenly mortgage. He is the loving *Master*. If someone is your Master that means you *live* in His presence. Your life is wrapped up in His. This Master, we're told in the Psalms, surrounds us with a shield of love. He gives shelter in His household. Not only shelter, but His refuge is a place of joy and help. Of growth and refreshment.

David said he would "seek refuge in [God]." What a promise, given to all, that if we seek Him we *will* find Him.

David here gets to the brass tacks of his requests: God, don't let me die. That was a *real* concern for David at many points of his life. I'd remind us that *spiritual* death is just as concerning as physical death. Jesus wrote to His beloved children in Sardis and said "you have a reputation for being alive —but you're dead."

There are many things that should concern us right now, but staying *spiritually vibrant*, in our first love, should always be one of them.

Psalm 141:9-10 - ⁹Protect me from the trap they have set for me, and from the snares of evildoers. ¹⁰Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by safely.

There are all sorts of snares laid out for God's people. Snares of temptation, of oppression, of bitterness, of deception. They may be menacing, but we don't need to be afraid. Paul wrote in 2nd Corinthians 3 that we need not be outwitted by our Enemy, the Devil, because we can clearly study what he does. How? By paying attention to the Scriptures. We are protected from snares by letting the mind of Christ be in us, giving us the proper perspective on life. We are protected from snares by being led by the Holy Spirit. By having this proper perspective and submission to the Lord, we will avoid snares like getting mad at God when we suffer. Or the snare of calling good evil and evil good.

Instead, like David, we can move through life in confident trust that the Lord is not only with us, but is doing a great work in our lives "while I pass by safely."

That closing image begs the question: Where are you headed? David was struggling, but he could continue day by day in the knowledge that he was not alone, he was not abandoned. He was moving through life *with* a God who cared for him. Even in a time of personal emergency he was able to keep his focus and his thoughts on His Lord and how he could live a life worthy of the God who had redeemed him.

Where are you headed? If you're not a Christian, the Bible explains you are headed toward a Christless eternity in hell. You don't have to end up there. God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance, but that's a choice you're going to have to make yourself. No one can make it for you.

Are you a child of God here today? You know where you're headed, in the end. The road before you may take you through many mountain ranges, storms and dark valleys, but God is faithful and He is with you. As you pass by, don't take any byways of bitterness or lovelessness or laxness. Go with God, *His* way, keeping pace with His leading, in the joyful refuge of your relationship with Him.