

When it comes to professional sport, there is a lot of anger involved in optimum performance. You cannot throw a 90mph fastball, feeling peaceful, or for that matter calm. It takes a component that involves anger. It takes a component of emotional investment that recognizes it is “us” or “me” against “them,” the other team. That teams wear distinctive uniforms and have team colours, is not just for the audience...in the stadium or watching via television. It also has to do with recognizing who we are. Who they are. Professional athletes make statements like: “when you put on this jersey, you put on your game face.” They are serious. There is a component of anger. They intend to win. To do what it takes. They are like soldiers going to war.

Billy Chapel is a fictional baseball player in Michael Shaara's novella, *For Love Of The Game*. He is a fictional pitcher for the Detroit Tigers. He has set records. He was the ace on the pitching staff the last time the Tigers won the World Series. He is a legend who devoted his whole life to the game he loves and plays so well. He has been betrayed. The owner of the Tigers has sold the team to a business consortium. He meets with Billy to tell him the new owners see him as property, more valuable on the trade market than as a member of the team. Billy is nearing the end of his career and he has always been a Tiger. He is due to pitch today. It's the last game of the season, a losing season for Detroit.

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They are playing the New York Yankees. The Yankees are in the playoffs, favourites to win the Series. Billy Chapel is dead serious about the next 3 hours. In the moment before the game begins, Gus the catcher trots out to the mound. Billy says, "I'm going to throw a little harder today." He is no longer 20 years old. Gus replies, with a smile on his face.... "Don't throw it all away in the first few innings." Gus chuckles. Billy doesn't. He doesn't smile. He is serious. And he is angry. Gus says, "Right," and trots back to his place behind home plate. In baseballese, Billy pitches. He is throwing bullets. He intends to win this game.

We have come to what I would call the hard part of Psalm 5. What is hard about it is its tone. It is clear that David is angry. It is clear David feels betrayed. Verse 9 begins, "Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction." He is angry. Whoever they are, they have become the enemy. David's emotion boils over and spills out. Now most of the Psalms including this one are either prayers or praise songs. This David is David, of "the Lord is my shepherd." But he is not feeling thankful here. He is not at peace. He is angry. He recognizes danger. Suddenly everything is about survival and even war.

Depending on how you count I have been involved in ministry for close to 50 years. I have taught my share of classes and workshops on prayer and praise. I can tell you that

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I have never dealt with anger as part of the theme of prayer and praise. Somehow it doesn't feel right. And there is a degree to which I feel like I have painted myself into a corner, and uncomfortable space as we work through verses 9-10 of Psalm 5. Ironically this was not what I had in mind when I embarked on this series...and yet the words are the words, in God's Word. The Holy Bible.

What can David mean here? The words are singularly plain in their meaning. David is angry. David is angry and feels betrayed. He knows what has been said. He knows what has been done. He recognizes danger to himself and to Israel. He is to some degree drawing his sword in preparation to defend himself. To defend the Kingdom. And at the same time he is talking not to his "enemies" but to the Lord his God, who is the Lord our God. This is a prayer. So here is where I land. The experience is not unlike being on the losing end of the score in a game of baseball with your final chance at bat. Time is running out. Options are few in number. It is time to put on your big boy pants and win it, or go home. And there is a good chance you could lose. The third verse of the Canadian hymn, "What A Friend We Have In Jesus" comes to mind. "Are we weak and heavy laden/ Cumbered with a load of care?/ Precious Saviour still our refuge/ Take It to the Lord in prayer."

Trouble never arises when it is expected by us. It tends to blind side us. We wind up on the ground rather dizzy

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and immediately angry. We want to defend ourselves. We want whoever did this to us to pay and pay dearly. Part of what the combination of Psalm 5 and the old hymn says to me, is that prayer is not just for the times when you are feeling very religious, at peace with God and mankind. Prayer is also for those seasons of the heart and mind and soul and body when you are angry. When you have had it, when you don't want to take it anymore. When there is blood in your eye. When you are feeling as David felt... Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. The counsel of the hymn is "Take it to the Lord in prayer. The counsel of Psalm 5 is that David did. That would seem to mean we can and we should.

And the more I think about that the more I begin to see the appropriateness of doing so. If I pray and share with God, with Jesus, with His Holy presence what I am feeling, I have a suspicion I will learn very quickly whether or not my feelings reflect reality. If I am to be chastised for being judgemental I have confidence the Spirit of the Lord will let me know. If I am seeing things clearly, and there is danger and there has been betrayal...I have confidence that will also become clear. God will affirm whether or not I am feeling....the truth of my circumstances. I may be justified in defending myself. It may be time to put distance between myself and

those who would hurt or harm me. I am certain God will not be silent. He may not say go get them! But He will not be silent.

Verse 9 says, “Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit.” There can be no understatement about what David is saying in his prayer here. Their speaking, their words are and are about doing lethal harm. I will paraphrase. “They intend to bury me.” I turned to my copy of Calvin’s Commentary on the Psalms. My commitment to Calvin is not because I espouse a specific doctrinal position, (I hesitate to say I am a Calvinist). What I like about Calvin is that he wrestles with the Scripture as he finds it. Not all Calvinists do. Here is what Calvin says. “David next compares them to open graves. It is as if he had said, they are devouring gulfs, meaning by this their insatiable desire of shedding blood. From all this we conclude that he had to contend with enemies who had neither humanity nor moderation. Being so miserably oppressed, he perseveres in prayer, but finds grounds of hope even from the confusion and apparent hopelessness of his outward condition.” (p. 148 Commentary on Joshua and the Psalms.

John Calvin is saying that in our lostness and pain, when our anger spills over at what we perceive as opposition of the most unjustified kind...it is not only right to take it to the Lord in prayer but that we should persevere in doing so. In the action of prayer there is the promise of hope. Not because we

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are perfect, but because we have bowed before God and His will for us in circumstances we find it hard to handle if not impossible to deal with. In the act of being prayerful, even in our anger, even in our hurt, we are honouring God by turning to Him with our circumstances and our emotional state.

There is no question what David wants to see happen. He prays that God will declare them guilty of their sin and bring them to the downfall which he cannot cause to happen. It is actually marvellous that David sees his limitation in the situation. Notice that. It is not that he is going to take up his sword and do unto them. And what is perhaps even more important, it is not that he even expects God to do what David wishes he could make happen, although he prays for that. But he has admitted his powerlessness to do much of anything in these particular circumstances. David's conclusions are plain. He would like to see these people banished for rebellion and sin against God. But again, he has confessed his powerlessness to change reality....when it is 9-6 in the top of the 9thand he is not on base....so he can't score.

Never be afraid, never think it is too small a problem, never think God is too busy. Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Let us pray;

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Lord there are times when we lose hope of solving problems we face. And there is no denying sometimes our inability to change things, circumstances that we face, or in which we find ourselves angers us. Draw us to your throne in the act of prayer. In our inadequacy help us to seek your all sufficiency, and to surrender to your power and your grace. In Jesus name we pray. Amen