

The Protector
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Psalm 141

Opening: Have you ever met anyone who enjoys being criticized or corrected? **How would you describe the difference between constructive correction versus destructive criticism?**

The psalmist who wrote this worship song was so self-aware he knew his natural tendency toward sin, and that only God could help him stay away from it.

The Big Idea: None of us like to be criticized; but ALL of us need to be corrected. Not only is our Heavenly Father the only One who KNOWS our heart and mind, He is the only one who can CONTROL our heart and mind and keep us from sin. That's why we need to RUN to Him for help in this area of our lives.

Psalm 141 (NLT)

A psalm of David.

¹ O Lord, I am calling to you. Please hurry!

Listen when I cry to you for help!

² Accept my prayer as incense offered to you,
and my upraised hands as an evening offering.

³ Take control of what I say, O Lord,
and guard my lips.

⁴ Don't let me drift toward evil
or take part in acts of wickedness.
Don't let me share in the delicacies
of those who do wrong.

⁵ Let the godly strike me!

It will be a kindness!

If they correct me, it is soothing medicine.

Don't let me refuse it.

But I pray constantly

against the wicked and their deeds.

⁶ When their leaders are thrown down from a cliff,
the wicked will listen to my words and find them true.

⁷ Like rocks brought up by a plow,
the bones of the wicked will lie scattered without burial.

⁸ I look to you for help, O Sovereign Lord.
You are my refuge; don't let them kill me.

⁹ Keep me from the traps they have set for me,
from the snares of those who do wrong.

¹⁰ Let the wicked fall into their own nets,
but let me escape.

- The term “of David” doesn’t necessarily mean David wrote this psalm, but it does indicate the psalm is based on or dedicated to David.¹
- Scholars believe it’s possible this psalm refers to the time David was running from his own son Absalom who was trying to overthrow him as king and kill him (2 Sam. 15:1-16.) Imagine, his own son was chasing him and David’s heart was sensitive enough to ask God: *“Help me not to sin!”*
- Verse one: The psalmist says “Lord,” speaking directly to God. Not in an irreverent way, but in a very personal way. (Illustration: Jim Law’s prayers)
- Notice the urgency of the plea, *“Hear me, and please hurry!”*
- It’s not human nature to seek correction, but David was seeking PROTECTION. **What would have made David so urgent in his plea?**
- The warrior in David caused him to understand his need for protection where he was weak. He was still paying the price from past sin so he obviously didn’t want to go there again! What about you and me? Do we urgently seek God’s daily protection from sin?
- In verse two David equated his prayer to incense and upraised hands; like the evening sacrifice at the temple back in Jerusalem.
- The Israelites were commanded to burn incense in worship *“every morning and evening (Ex. 30:7-8). Revelation 5:8*

- says that bowls of incense “are the prayers of the saints” (see also Rev. 8:3-4). Hence, it is common to understand the smoke rising from the burning incense as a symbol of the prayers of God’s people rising to Him.”²*
- When he speaks of lifting his hands in worship, “...[he] wanted his prayer to be placed before God just as priests placed sacrifices before God.”³
 - Verse three: **Why was his mouth the first line of defense he requests?**
 - Verse four acknowledges the tendency to “drift” toward evil and to “take part” in wickedness. **In what ways can our “big fat mouth” cause us to drift into sin?**
 - James 3:8 (NLT) says, “...but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison.” If James is correct, what are we to do?
 - Look at the second part of verse four. Now the psalmist describes misusing our mouth in another way: “Don’t let me share in the delicacies of those who do wrong.” **What does that mean? How can we avoid it?**

Psalm 1:1 (ESV)

1 Blessed is the man
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the
 way of sinners,
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

2 Corinthians 6:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what
 partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what
 fellowship has light with darkness?

1 Corinthians 15:33 (ESV)

³³ Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.”

- Bad company corrupts, so the psalmist asks for some GOOD company.

- Look at verse five again (NLT) *“⁵ Let the godly strike me! It will be a kindness! If they correct me, it is soothing medicine. Don’t let me refuse it.”*
- **Why do cyclists (Jesse?) and runners go with friends? What are the benefits of going together versus going it alone?**

Basketball Hall of Famer Allen Iverson (76’ers) said of Coach Larry Brown it was when he began accepting Brown's "constructive criticism" and coaching that he turned into a superstar. He said, *“That’s when I became an MVP. That’s when I became an All-Star,”*⁴

Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 (NLT)

⁹ Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. ¹⁰ If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. ¹¹ Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? ¹² A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.

The Life Application Study Bible gives us some good coaching: *“Nobody really likes criticism, but everybody can benefit from it when it is given wisely and taken humbly. David suggested what to do when facing criticism from the godly: (1) Don’t refuse it, (2) consider it a kindness, and (3) keep quiet (don’t fight back). Putting these suggestions into practice will help you control how you react to criticism, making it productive rather than destructive.”*⁵

- **How can our small group at church play this role for us as followers of Christ? If you feel the need to “correct” a fellow believer, what are some things to keep in mind?**

Galatians 6:1–2 (ESV)

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Hebrews 10:24–25 (ESV)

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

- End of verse five: *“But I pray constantly against the wicked and their deeds.”* Is David about to “go negative?”
- In the rest of the psalm (vv. 6-10) he asks God to protect him from evil people and give them what they deserve. [Note on: Imprecatory psalms]⁶
- Verse six can be a challenge to interpret, but it is more “redemptive” than just asking God to give the wicked what they deserve.
- Basically, the psalmist says maybe when some of these evildoers get the punishment they deserve, they will listen to God's word and turn from sin.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- It's not unusual for us to ask God for protection from harm, perhaps we're a little less likely to ask Him to protect us from our own tendency to sin.
- Confession after we've messed up is necessary. Asking God for protection to **KEEP FROM SIN** is the real preventive medicine we need.
- Not only is our Heavenly Father the only One who **KNOWS** our heart and mind, He is the only one who can **CONTROL** our heart and mind and keep us from sin. That's why we need to **RUN** to Him for help in this area of our lives.
- The question for us all is whether we **URGENTLY** cry out to God to keep us away from sin? We can get urgent about our list of prayer needs, but how **DESPERATE** are we for God's protection from “drifting” into sin?

Our Lesson Writer said it well:

“Prayerlessness is conceit because it indicates that we think we are capable of running our lives without God. Prayerlessness may be one of our worst sins because it arises from an unstated belief that we are in charge. We are not. We need God and His help, so we pray.”⁷

- We were also reminded in this Psalm that God uses people to provide loving, godly correction when we need it. Both giving and receiving this kind of correction require a heart of maturity that only God can provide.
- None of us like to be criticized; but ALL of us need to be corrected. This week, will we make it an urgent priority to ask God to put a “guard” over our lives to keep us from taking part in “acts of wickedness?”
- Will we ask Him to “hurry” and “take control” of what we say and do? Will we receive His correction with gratitude for protecting us from drifting into sin?

¹ of David is associated with the authorship of the Psalms as a whole. However, the Hebrew phrase often translated as “of David” (ledawid) does not necessarily indicate authorship. The Hebrew preposition lamedh (le-) can mean “to,” “for,” “by,” or “about.” This makes it unclear whether the phrase “of David” in psalm titles means that the psalm was written “by David” or “for David” or was dedicated “to David.” In addition, the psalm titles were most likely added later. Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). Faithlife Study Bible (Ps 3:title). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

² Lifeway. (n.d.). *Explore the Bible Leader’s Guide*.

³ ibid

⁴ <http://www.sportingnews.com/nba/news/allen-iverson-hall-of-fame-speech-springfield-shaq-yao-izzo-biggie-tupac-mj/m54ve020kymu16imw5izjjayt>

⁵ Tyndale. Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size) (Kindle Locations 149338-149341). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

⁶ IMPRECATORY PSALMS Act of invoking a curse. In the Imprecatory Psalms the author calls for God to bring misfortune and disaster upon the enemies (Pss. 5; 11; 17; 35; 55; 59; 69; 109; 137; 140). Brand, C., Draper, C., England, A., Bond, S., Clendenen, E. R., & Butler, T. C. (Eds.). (2003). Imprecation, Imprecatory Psalms. In Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary (p. 812). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

⁷ Lifeway. (n.d.). *Explore the Bible Leader’s Guide*.