

PSALMS

Chapter 86

Great Is Your Steadfast Love
A Prayer of David.

Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. 2 Preserve my life, for I am godly; save your servant, who trusts in you—you are my God. 3 Be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all the day. 4 Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. 5 For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you. 6 Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; listen to my plea for grace. 7 In the day of my trouble I call upon you, for you answer me. 8 There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours. 9 All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name. 10 For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God. 11 Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name. 12 I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever. 13 For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol. 14 O God, insolent men have risen up against me; a band of ruthless men seeks my life, and they do not set you before them. 15 But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. 16 Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant, and save the son of your maidservant. 17 Show me a sign of your favor, that those who hate me may see and be put to shame because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

Ps 86 A prayer for God’s help when attacked by enemies, whose fierce onslaughts betray their disdain for the Lord. Whether or not David was the author (see Introduction: Authorship and Titles), the psalmist’s identification of himself as God’s “servant” (v. 2) suggests his royal status and thus his special relationship with the Lord (see 2Sa 7:5, 8 and note on Ps 18 title). The enemies may then be either those within the kingdom who refuse to acknowledge him as the Lord’s anointed, or foreign powers that are attempting to remove him from the international scene. (CSB)

The psalm is composed of five stanzas, having a symmetrical verse pattern (four, three, three, three, four). The author identifies himself as the Lord’s servant in the first and last stanzas, which also contain the prayer for God’s mercy and deliverance from the enemy threat. The center stanza (vv. 8–10) hails the Lord as the incomparable, the only God, whom all the nations will someday worship. Verse 9 is the center verse. (CSB)

Only Davidic psalm included in Book Three (Ps 73–89). Similar to the others in this book, it asks God for protection against enemies (v 14) and expresses confidence that the Lord shall indeed act (vv 5, 15–17). This is a personal psalm, apparently originating as a prayer of David before God. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–7, plea for grace; vv 8–13, You alone are God; vv 14–17, show a sign of Your favor. (TLSB)

86 title prayer of David. This is the only psalm in Book III (Ps 73–89) that is ascribed to David. Perhaps its placement among the Korahite psalms is because those who arranged the Psalter perceived a thematic link between v. 9 and 87:4. (CSB)

86:1–4 Initial prayer for God to have mercy and protect the life of his servant. (CSB)

These verses have an interweaving of David’s plea with statements of his need and of his faith. (PBC)

86:1 *incline your ear* – Stoop down and listen. (TLSB)

poor and needy. Here, as often in the Psalms, “poor” characterizes not necessarily one who has no possessions, but one who is (and recognizes that he is) without resources to effect his own deliverance (or secure his own life, safety or well-being)—and so is dependent on God.(CSB)

The reason for this urgent appeal is that he is that he afflicted (s.v. Ps. 9:12) and poor, meaning that he is unable to resist the source of affliction without God’s help. What was true for the psalmist is true for all of us who believe, namely, our needs drive us to God in prayer, and the greater the need the more urgent the prayer. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

86:2 *I am godly* – Hebrew *hasid*, which occurs 26 times in the Psalms (once of God: 145:17, “loving”; cf. 18:25) and is usually rendered (in the plural) in the NIV as “the godly” or “saints.” It is one of several Hebrew words for God’s people, referring to them as people who are or should be devoted to God and faithful to him.). (CSB)

He bases his appeal on the faith. On the one hand he is a “beloved” or “devoted one” (s.v. Ps. 23:6. This is a major covenant word in the Bible: whoever is “beloved” belongs to the covenant of the Lord and that covenant is characterized by the Lord’s steadfast love for his people. Because God loves him with such a steadfast love, he can pray with confidence for God’s help. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

You are my God. Not that David has chosen him, but that he has chosen David to be his servant (see 1Sa 13:14; 15:28; 16:12; 2Sa 7:8). David’s devotion to God and God’s commitment to him are deliberately juxtaposed. (CSB)

86:3 *be gracious* – His prayer is, nonetheless, a prayer for divine favor (“have mercy on me” (s.v. Ps. 4:1), indicating that his affliction might be such that he must appeal for undeserved favor – he will refer to God as a forgiving God. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

86:4 *my soul.* From the depths of despair, the psalmist cries out to God for help. (TLSB)

The word “soul” signifies the whole person, and as such the psalmist is asking the Lord to extend to him his covenantal blessing, according to which the Lord guards and keeps his people from all harm (cf. Nu. 6:24-26; Ps. 121). (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary - Psalms)

86:5–7 In his need David prays to the Lord because, out of his kindness and love, God answers prayer. (CSB)

In this and the next section there the plea moves on to a surer foundation for his prayer, namely the attributes of God which supply David with confidence to pray. (PBC)

86:5 *are good and forgiving* – The goodness of God means that God will be good to him, just as the fact that God is forgiving God means that God will forgive him. God has the wellbeing of his people in mind, physically and spiritually. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

abounding in steadfast love – God is “abundant in loyal love” to all who call on him. These are the “beloved” because they have received many blessings that God’s faithful love showers upon those who who trust. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

86:7 *you will answer me* – The psalmist now simply expresses his confidence that God will do it. He will call upon the Lord because he knows that when he calls on God in his distress God will answer him. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

86:8–10 The God to whom David appeals is the only true God. No other “god” acts with such sovereign power (see 115:3–7; 135:13–17)—that is why David appeals to him and why all the nations will someday worship him. (CSB)

86:8 *among the gods* – This does not imply an acceptance of polytheism. It simply recognizes that there are many so-called “gods” in the world whom people serve in their blindness. None of them are real, however. (PBC)

Idols to which pagan religions pray (cf 1Co 8:4–6). (TLSB)

nor are there any works like yours – Works of the demons stand behind the false gods (1Co 10:19–20), but God’s works are greater and more powerful. (TLSB)

86:9 *All the nations*. This is the center verse of the psalm and contains the psalm’s most exalted confession of faith concerning God’s sovereign and universal rule. (CSB)

86:10 *wondrous things*. To this is usually added a call to praise, summoning all who hear to take up the praise—to acknowledge and joyfully celebrate God’s glory, his goodness and all his righteous acts. (CSB)

86:11–13 A prayer for godliness and a vow to praise. (CSB)

86:11 *Teach me*. What would be the benefit if God saved him from his enemies but abandoned him to his own waywardness? David’s dependence on God is complete, and so is his devotion to God—save me from the enemy outside but also from my frailty within (see 25:5; 51:7, 10). Only one who is thus devoted to God may expect God’s help and will truly fulfill the vow (v. 12). (CSB)

Since God is so great and does such marvelous things, the psalmist wants to know more. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

your way – OT way of describing faith and living by faith. (TLSB)

When God teaches him his way, he will walk in it, he will live in harmony with the will of God. David wants to be single minded in his devotion to him. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

unite my heart. Lit, “make my heart one.” Undivided between competing loyalties (cf Mt 6:24). (TLSB)

fear your name – Hbr *yare*, as in “fear the Lord” and “fear God”—common expressions in the Psalms. They mean to “trust in the Lord. (TLSB p. 842)

86:13 *depths*. Not a reference to hell, but the grave. Jacob, e.g., spoke of dying as going to Sheol (Gn 37:35). (TLSB)

86:14–17 Conclusion: the prayer renewed. (CSB)

Such repetition of prayer is not a demonstration of weakness of faith; it is rather an example of the persistence in prayer which Jesus urged upon his followers. (PBC)

86:14 *insolent*. The Hebrew for this word suggests also ferocity. (CSB)

ruthless men. In their arrogance they dismiss the heavenly Warrior, who is David’s defender. (CSB)

People who do not accept David’s royal authority over them. (TLSB)

do not set you before them – They do not keep the First Commandment of loving God above all things (cf Ex 20:3; Mt 22:37–38). (TLSB)

86:15 Very close parallel with Ex 34:6–7. God’s nature is one of patience and mercy. He does not deal hastily with His people on account of their sins, but He forbears, awaiting their repentance. (TLSB)

abounding in steadfast love – The Lord has an abundance of this, a never ending provision of faithful love for his own. The psalmist’s life of faith in the Lord has benefited from these divine attributes again and again. Now he is in need again. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

This beautiful description of the Lord is one of Israel’s favorite descriptions of the gracious God. (PBC)

86:16 *give your strength*. Exert your power in my behalf. (CSB)

son of your maidservant. David’s mother, apparently, was also a believer in God. (TLSB)

86:17 *favor*. David seeks assurances of God’s grace. (TLSB)

may see. May see that you stand with me and help me. (CSB)

When David is delivered, it will be clear to all that God is ruling and that his will cannot be overturned. Then the plans of Satan’s allies will have come to nothing, and God will be glorified. (PBC)

Ps 86 Ascribed to King David, this psalm points to God’s steadfast love (vv 5, 13, 15) as the reason why prayers are answered. Rather than feeling overwhelmed by the obstacles that confront us (v 14), keep the eyes of your faith focused upon the Lord, for He alone is God (v 10). Because of the Lord’s steadfast love, He cannot overlook or neglect His children. Their care and preservation is part of His very nature—He cannot and will not fail to act according to His mercy

and grace. • Lord, help me and comfort me so that I may enjoy peace of mind and spirit. Amen.
(TLSB)