

Psalm 25

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[0 : 00] In the Church Bible, you'll find Psalm 25 on page 556. Psalm 25 says this.

A Psalm of David. To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. In you I trust, O my God.

Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame, but they will be put to shame who are treacherous without excuse.

Show me your ways, O Lord. Teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long.

Remember, O Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways. According to your love, remember me, for you are good, O Lord.

[1 : 14] Good and upright is the Lord. Therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.

All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his covenant. For the sake of your name, O Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.

Who then is the man that fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him. He will spend his days in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land.

The Lord confides in those who fear him. He makes his covenant known to them. My eyes are ever on the Lord, for only he will release my feet from the snare.

Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart have multiplied. Free me from my anguish. Look upon my affliction and my distress, and take away all my sins.

[2 : 19] See how my enemies have increased, and how fiercely they hate me. Guard my life and rescue me. Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.

May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you. Redeem Israel, O God, from all their troubles. Before we continue, it's appropriate that we stop and ask for God's help, so let's pray.

God of heaven, we are privileged this morning, indeed, to stand before an open Bible, without fear of reprisal, without really even serious chance of interruption.

We can come and freely study and consider and bathe in your word. Lord, we know that for many of our brothers and sisters across the world this morning, that is not the case.

And that just by gathering together, they risk their lives. And whilst we pray for them, we ask that you would be their strength and shield, we ask that you would help us not to wantonly waste the opportunity that we have to study in such an unhurried and focused environment.

[3 : 55] please help us. Please speak to us. We don't want this to be a merely religious occasion, and I have next to no wisdom to offer anybody, and so I pray that what we consider this morning would be the true exposition of your word, and that that would be the thing that strengthens our hearts and our faith, that we might serve you and love you all our days.

In Jesus' name. Amen. I don't know about you, but I often feel that the sort of cut and thrust of life is hard enough just for being a human, never mind throwing into the mix that I'm a Christian.

And if you've been a Christian for longer than, oh, 24 hours, you've probably discovered that the Christian life is one of ups and downs. Each of us, in the midst of seeking to know and serve and live for God, experiences trials and hardships, and we experience blessings, wonderful privileges and joys.

But it is very much a life of peaks and troughs, is it not? It is a walk that comes with its own unique challenges. We experience conflict in the world around us.

We find that once we become Christians, suddenly daily life contains all sorts of temptations that it didn't before.

[5 : 32] Suddenly we're uncomfortable in the world. And it's because we don't belong to this world, once we have chosen to walk with and follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

But beyond that, for the Christian, there's also a great conflict inside of themselves. One of the great marks of the person who is truly born again of God's Spirit is that they hate the fact that they're still full of sin.

They find that to be their daily experience. You wake up in the morning, sin hasn't been sleeping. It's wide awake. And there it is before you.

How many times have I risen from my bed and my first thoughts have been grumpy, sullen, angry thoughts?

And it's because I am still battling with the old me. The old me that hates God and does not want to submit to his will and way.

[6 : 40] Now, if you're here this morning and that all sounds really weird. You're not a Christian. You don't self-identify as a Christian. Or maybe you do, but you're not kind of sure where you really are.

This morning as we study Psalm 25, I'm hoping to give you something of an insight to what it's like on the other side. What it sort of is like for a person who believes in God day by day and through the course of their life.

What is it like walking with God in the ups and the downs of life? We're going to sort of move through this very personal and reflective Psalm from David.

I have five points, not just because I'm a five-pointer, but just that I think the Psalm naturally falls that way. Let's begin then by diving into verses one to three.

What are the things that we need to do? How should we live? What are we supposed to arm ourselves with as we seek to walk with God in this world?

[7 : 49] Well, the first thing is that we need to ensure that we are trusting the real God. God is that not the case. It would be very easy to sort of slide into a religious life in the context of having friends who go to church and never actually come to a point where your personal trust is in the real one, true and living God.

Now, if ever there were a man in history who knew what it meant to have enemies, it would be the author of this Psalm, a man called David. He was probably one of, well, he was certainly one of Israel's greatest kings.

I guess you could probably toss a coin up to say, was it better with David or Solomon? I guess Solomon might have been a slightly more peaceful and glorious reign, but David was the man after God's own heart.

He was the anointed king of Israel that replaced the wicked man, Saul, who had not yet given true faith to God when he came into his position of kingship.

And David, through thick and through thin, through battles, and I'm not talking metaphorically here, I'm talking a guy running around with a sword, through those kinds of experiences, through being hunted down as a wanted man, through hiding out with criminals, through committing great and terrible transgression and finding forgiveness.

[9 : 22] David had come to put his personal confidence in God. To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul, he says. My God, in you I trust. These are his words.

Finding himself in the thick of some situation once again, some hardship, some trial, he asks that God would prove himself to be the true and real God.

That he would prove himself to be the gracious and loving shepherd and friend that he has always been to David. Let me not be put to shame, he says. Let not my enemies exult over me.

None who wait for you shall be put to shame. They shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. This concept of put to shame, being put to shame, is sort of ancient Near Eastern speak for having, sort of to be exposed as having trusted in a God that isn't real.

I'm sure for many of you, as soon as I say that, your mind is going to 1 Kings 18 and Elijah and the prophets of Baal and there's this whole sort of showdown between Elijah and the prophets of a false god and Elijah sort of does everything he can to make it impossible for this sacrifice to catch fire.

[10 : 41] He makes everything wet three times and he builds a big trench and fills that with water and then he cries out and asks the Lord to prove himself. And if you were to read in the context, it is that the prophets of Baal were put to shame.

They were shown to have trusted in a God that was not real. Shown to have depended upon and called upon a God that wasn't there. And Elijah's God was shown to be the one true and living God.

God doesn't do letdowns. It's one of the things that you discover walking with him in the ups and downs of life. He doesn't make mistakes. Doesn't mean he always does exactly what we expect.

But God at root is trustworthy and all who put their confidence in him, verse three, will never be shown to have trusted in a God that cannot be relied upon.

Nobody has ever put their faith in God through the Lord Jesus Christ and looked back on it and thought that was a bad idea. Nobody who has ever truly come to God in that way and found in God a saviour and refuge has ever regretted it.

[12 : 04] So the natural question to ask each of you here this morning is, where is your confidence? When your mum dies? When your children die?

When you lose your job? When some disaster strikes you to the core, where is your hope? To whom can you turn in such a moment?

In your life, is prayer a reaction? Or is it something you have to force yourself to do all of the time?

Is it something you only do on religious occasions? Can you go and be alone with God? Do you know what I mean when I say that? Ask yourself these searching questions.

Do you trust the real God? Verses 1 to 3. But secondly, you see, ensuring that you have trusted the real God, David discovers at least, is only part of the equation.

[13 : 16] It's only the beginning of the situation. Because once you have trusted the real God, you then know that, well, having trusted him, how am I then supposed to live? Verse 4.

Make me to know your ways, O Lord. Teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me. For you are the God of my salvation. For you I wait all the day long.

Now we must be careful with texts like this. People are prone to sort of whip these kind of texts right out of the psalm and make them mean things that they don't mean.

David is not asking for wisdom to make amoral decisions. He's not asking about whether he should be a butcher, baker or candlestick maker here.

He's not trying to sort of get some sort of divine guidance on whom he should marry or where he should work or any of those kinds of questions. It's not that kind of guidance that's being discussed here.

[14 : 17] In the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms, when you read the Psalmist writing about the Lord's ways, the Lord's truth, the Lord's paths, David is asking for guidance to live a godly life.

Power to make godly decisions in the midst of temptation. Wisdom to know how he should conduct himself in his life.

It's not a plea for signs or leadings or liver shivers. This is a request for wisdom to know how to live in the moral sphere of his life. And he recognises that the only hope he has for living a moral life is in God himself.

This is not sort of pull up my bootstraps theology. This is not just sort of tighten the belt buckles and do everything we can to make ourselves seem to be something we're not. This is him saying, for you I wait all the day long.

So moment by moment through the day, David's confidence for walking in the Lord's paths is the Lord. It's not as if he sort of got, he started the whole thing by God's grace, and now that he is in the thick of it, he's sort of got to fix himself.

[15 : 35] It's not as if the entry gate into the journey was free entry, but once you get on the ride, you've got to pay by the minute. No, he recognises that moment by moment, day by day, he needs God to be there.

Intervene, God. Teach me. Notice all these active verbs. Teach me. Lead me. David, of course, has already written about being led in paths of righteousness, hasn't he?

For the Lord's namesake. This is about God teaching us how to be holy. Does your faith have hands?

Is it merely an intellectual conviction of your mind, or do you find that in each and every day, it has bearing upon the decisions that you make?

There are things that if you're going to follow God, you've got to stop doing. And, brothers and sisters, I wish I could tell you that there were no disconnect in my life between the things that I preach and the way that I live, but I can't say that because there is.

[16 : 55] There's a disconnect between the things that I know to be true in my head and the things that I trust in my heart. There's a disconnect between the things that I know I ought to do and the things that I am doing.

And that is why in each and every moment, I need help. I need God. I don't just need rules. They're not changing me.

Rules have never helped me get any better. But God has. Now I need his power moment by moment. John Calvin said this, whilst faith alone justifies, justifying faith is never alone.

Consider that for yourself. And that, of course, leads us very naturally into the next thing. You see, David can't talk about wanting to walk with God and live in the Lord's ways for more than a couple of verses before he cries, remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions. According to your steadfast love, remember me for the sake of your goodness. David finds that he just can't get very far into praying about this, the moral sphere of his life.

[18 : 25] He can't get very far into thinking about it, writing about it, before he realises the desperate nature of his own shortcomings. Sin, sadly, is ever before him, deeply within him.

David thinks of himself as someone who has transgressed. A transgression is when there's a line, there's a barrier here, there's something that says he'd come this far, no further, and a transgressor goes over it into a place they ought not to go.

He references the sins of his youth. And youth is a time when one's passions are high and life seems exciting and there's all sorts of things in front of you.

I speak as one still in that time of life. But even in the midst of youth, maybe especially in the midst of youth, one's passions can lead one into temptation, into folly, into making decisions and living in ways and doing things that God hates and that separate us from him.

The sight of his sin provokes a cry for mercy, verse 6 from David. Remember your mercy. It's a, it's a, it's a unilateral cry, isn't it?

[20 : 04] It's not, he's not offering to God anything that would earn such mercy. David has nothing to bring to him. He can only come to God on the basis of God's mercy, on the basis of who God is and what God has done, not on the basis of anything within himself.

what is it that he says? Good and upright is the Lord, verse 8, therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

That's good news. I qualify for God to lead me in the way. because God has set his love upon David, God intends not only to forgive him, but to change him.

God instructs, he leads, he deals with us. He leads the humble in what is right. If you're anything like me, when you read some of these Old Testament verses and they talk about people being humble or upright, I get a bit uncomfortable.

I don't know about you, it feels a bit proud to me. Oh, God leads, you know, he's just made it clear that God leads him and then he's saying God leads the humble. So he's sort of patting himself on the back here for being humble.

[21 : 26] But I think we're reading something into humble there that perhaps is not present because the kind of humble that David is talking about is the sort of bankrupt humble, not the sort of, you know, shy and retiring humble.

It's the humble of a got nothing there's nothing I can bring to this. It's not like I'm sort of partners with God in this enterprise of changing me.

I haven't got the power, I can't, there's nothing valuable that I can contribute to this process other than surrender. God, and God, you see, is one who deals with people on the basis of agreements.

Verse 10, all the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness for those who keep the demands of his covenant, who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

David's thought of approaching God is tied up with an agreement that God has made.

[22 : 36] Now, when David is writing, he is under an agreement enacted upon sacrifices. If he offers sacrifices at the temple, his sins will be forgiven.

And I'm not sure that David and other Old Testament believers really grasped the mechanics of that. And I think probably amongst them, they understood that there's no way that a bull or a lamb is sufficient to cover me and my wrongdoing.

But by faith, they accepted that what God said was the case and God said, these things will forgive you. And they believed in him and were saved by their faith. We, of course, relate to God in the midst of a different agreement.

We are in a new covenant. And the nature of this covenant is that one sacrifice has been offered once and for all. A perfect sacrifice that never needs adding to and nor could be taken away from.

I speak, of course, of the sacrifice of God's own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We live in the midst of an agreement enacted upon better promises.

[23 : 58] God's forgiveness doesn't have to go and slaughter an animal.

They don't have to perform any ceremonies or rituals. They don't have to become anything other than that they need to fall in love with Jesus Christ.

they need to give themselves over to Jesus, cast themselves upon him and what he has done. And then you will find that verse 10 is much more true from the lips of one under such an agreement.

All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness. Because God has done something that means the believer in Christ can never be separated from him.

Because no longer is there any part of it dependent upon what you do. All of it, all our hope, all our confidence is in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ.

[25 : 16] And all of this of course, this free grace that God offers, this forgiveness that is found in him, magnifies to his glory.

Verse 11, for your namesake, O Lord, pardon my guilt for it is great. That's a great argument to use with God. If you ever need an argument with God, for your namesake is the best one.

Because you see, God knows that when he glorifies himself in our sight through the cross and reckless, hopeless sinners are redeemed.

His glory is displayed in the brightest of colours. That's why angels long to look into it. Because it's staggering.

that those whom he ought to punish and destroy, instead he makes his children. It's not even just that he forgives them and then walks away, sort of morally neutral towards them now.

[26 : 28] It's not a sort of transactional thing. He welcomes them as his family, brings them in in love, pardons their guilt, all for the sake of his glorious name.

So, we've come a long way. Let's briefly recap. This psalm poses to us a question in verse 12, much as Psalm 24 did, if you've read there before.

Who is the man who fears the Lord? It asks in verse 12. If we trust in the real God, verses 1 to 3, live the right way, verses 4 and 5, see the real problem about ourselves, our sin, verses 6 to 11, we may be said to fear the Lord.

There is something about us that has grasped enough truth such that there is now a reverence and a fear of God. The fear of God is to be living and thinking appropriately in line with divine realities, to consider the world in such a way as honors and pleases God, to find that he has come to matter most.

God and David then, having considered these things, suddenly wells up considering the great benefits that he now has.

[28 : 13] So verses 12 to 15. Let's just whiz through these benefits. God promises to lead and instruct us as we continue on.

So far, David has prayed and asked God to lead him. But now in verse 12, he says, God will instruct in the way that he should choose.

God will lead him. Whether in peace or conflict, he will be safe.

Verse 13, this man who fears the Lord, his soul shall abide in well-being and his offspring shall inherit the land. Whatever the situation that surrounds him, whatever it is that surrounds you, if you are walking with God in the path of obedience, none of it is meaningless or wasted, but all of it is for your good.

nothing ultimately can harm you anymore. There can be terrible pains in this life that I did not wish to belittle.

[29 : 26] There can be loss and sacrifice. But at the very end of things, when we stand before the King of glory and all of life is behind us and there is a final reckoning of all that has been done and taken place, we will consider ourselves to have been perfectly safe the whole time.

Because we follow such a God. my translation for verse 14 has a slightly more vivid image. It says, the friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him.

What a striking contrast. That in the midst of coming to truly reverence and understand God, and I must be honest and say that any true understanding of God at first provokes fear, real, I'm not sort of, I don't mean reverence, I mean fear, being afraid.

Because the sight of the greatness of his majesty and his power and our wickedness and smallness appropriately ought to make us scared. But when we get there, fear, that's the place from which God makes us his friends.

And the perfect love that he has comes and casts out fear. And it becomes a sweetness, a closeness, that if you haven't experienced it, I can't really explain it to you.

[31 : 18] God makes friends with those whom he has saved. He promises spiritual intimacy with his people and he grants them spiritual understanding.

He is with them even in the here and now to bring deliverance as fits the occasion. Verse 15, God really does intervene in the lives of his people here and now and bring deliverance and rescue even in a temporal sense.

It's not that being a Christian means that you're always going to suffer. Sometimes things will happen in your life and you will be rescued from things you didn't even realise you were going to be rescued from.

So I'm driving over the moors this morning and very strangely there's this sort of mist, a very wet fog all around me and I'm having to go right down to 10 miles an hour.

And at this point of course my sanctification is being tested and I'm beginning to fear that I'm going to be late. I have a pathological fear of lateness and what should happen but that as I am now going 10 miles an hour I arrive at the largest puddle you have ever seen.

[32 : 52] A small lake had arisen in the road. And if I had been going the speed I'd been going previously I don't know what would have happened. We might have sunk. It was that deep.

something that I thought this is a negative experience God had used to keep me and my family safe.

Now the cynic amongst you would say oh you're reading your religious experience into a coincidence but I'm 25 and even at 25 I've been alive long enough to know that coincidences did not happen.

God is at work every minute of every day in every circumstance. The world is not upholding itself.

The laws of nature are not sort of self-propagating. They don't just keep themselves going. You leave nature on its own and everything dies. God keeps everything going.

[33 : 56] Actively upholding all things by the power of his word. And if God took his hands away for a second the world would fall out of space.

And he is with those who follow him. What love what grace what blessings we have as those who walk with God in the ups and downs of life.

Will you not follow him? It's not always easy. It's always good. Not always happy but it's always joyful.

It's not always comfortable. It's always peaceful. And finally having considered all of these things.

Having considered that walking with God means trusting in the real God. Having considered that it means living God's way. Having considered that it means seeing the truth about yourself sometimes uncomfortably.

[35 : 15] And seeing the great benefits that come from fearing the Lord. What is it that David does now? He prays a real prayer. prayer. There's not a hint of spiritual triumphalism in the closing words of this psalm.

Even though he has just said his soul shall abide in well-being and his offspring shall inherit the land, verse 13, he says, turn to me and be gracious to me for I'm lonely and afflicted. He has been genuinely rejoicing in exquisite spiritual truths but he's not trying to pretend that all of these things are fully realized in his life right now.

Because he knows that God is gracious and powerful but that life is still hard and that walking with God still has its ups and its downs. He has deep troubles of his heart, verse 17, the troubles of my heart are enlarged.

Bring me out of my distress. He even knows that some of the problems in his life are his own fault, verse 18, consider my affliction and my trouble and forgive all my sins.

There's a connection in his mind between the trouble he has and the sins that he does. And he concludes much where he began which makes a very circular picture of this psalm, doesn't it?

[36 : 52] He concludes by asking that God would help him and strengthen him. He confesses his trust and his refuge in God, verse 20, echoes of verses 1 and 2.

Verse 21, when he says, may integrity and uprightness preserve me. He's not saying, I have all integrity and uprightness. He's saying, make integrity and uprightness in me that they might keep me safe.

He prays for redemption for all of God's people. Well, walking with God in the ups and downs of life, faith, some of it's great, some of it's heartbreaking.

But if you have sort of been an outsider listening in this morning as I've talked about these things, let me just plead with you.

Let me just entreat you. there was once a time when I was consciously an enemy of God and I went out of my way to do things that I knew God hated.

[38 : 16] And whilst I screamed at the top of my voice that there was no God, I screamed it alone. I sort of accused God of not being there.

I knew he was there. And so do you. All of us know he's there. We're made that way. And we have to try and convince ourselves he isn't there to justify our sin.

A study was done recently at Cambridge University on how children are born believing in God. And they have to learn he isn't there.

What does that tell you? God, divine things are hard wired into who you are. And I would invite you to come on this walk with me.

Turn away from the love of sinning. Cast yourself on the Lord's mercy. He will receive you. He'll have you. Any day.

[39 : 27] Up to the very eleventh hour, there were two men on the cross next to Jesus. One of them was saved, that none of you might despair.

And one of them was damned, that none of you might presume. God's love you. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this psalm and the way that it comes out of a real person's life.

A person who experienced many of the things that we experience as followers of Jesus. And we pray for those of us here who love the Lord, that we would have the same kinds of attitudes as David had towards you and towards our sin and towards your grace.

Help us to cry out to you in the midst of daily life and strengthen us. And for any here this morning who have not yet bowed the knee to Jesus Christ, open their eyes to see what they're missing, to see the wonder of friendship with the Lord.

Help them, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. Father, I've sought to speak as one poor beggar telling other poor beggars where to find bread and I ask that the things we have considered would sit upon our hearts at least for today and that you would help us to reflect on our great need of you.

[41 : 17] Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.