

A God Who is Near

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[0 : 00] If you have a Bible, go ahead and turn with me to Psalm 25. If you're here this morning, that means you have survived. You survived the sickness that is going around, and you survived not breaking your neck in the parking lot this morning.

So I'm glad that you're here. I'm glad to be with you. And I'm glad that you are joining with us in worship. If you have been with us for any amount of time, you'll know that we are taking a little bit of a break from Romans.

We saw that last week with, or two weeks ago, with Jonathan Clark coming to us and talking about what it's like to walk with Christ. And then last week with Luke as well.

Over the next couple weeks, we'll be in the Psalms. So we're taking a break from Romans. We're in the Psalms. And we are delighted that you are with us.

With that, let's turn our attention to God's Word. Psalm 25. To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

[1 : 06] O my God, in you I trust. Let me not be put to shame. Let not my enemies exult over me. Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame.

They shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. 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. And for you I wait all the day long. 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, O Lord. Good and upright is the Lord. Therefore, he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right.

[2 : 02] And teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness. For those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great. Who is the man who fears the Lord? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.

His soul shall abide in well-being, and his offspring shall inherit the land. The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.

My eyes are ever towards the Lord, for he will pluck my feet out of the net. Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.

The troubles of my heart are enlarged. Bring me out of my distress. Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins. Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me.

[3 : 04] O guard my soul and deliver me. Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you.

Redeem, O Israel, O God, out of all his troubles. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word. We ask that you might use it to show us your glory, that we would see Christ more clearly.

And Father, that we might know your love more intimately. And we ask this in Christ's name. Amen.

Like I said, I'm thankful to be with you this morning.

Last week, we had Luke fill in because I was sick. If you're here, you've made it. You're not sick, or not yet. It's funny, though, when you're sick, it has a reorienting principle.

I like to think of myself as somewhat of a tough guy, right? Like I've been in the Army, that stands for something. You know, I'm a dad, I get beat up on a lot. But something about being sick kind of reorients you and makes you realize, man, I'm not as tough as I thought.

[4 : 13] I think there's a word for this. It's called the man flu. You know, when things are really bad, I am really good. But if I'm a little bit sick, and in this case, I was kind of a lot sick.

I don't think I suffered from the man flu, despite the accusations in my home. I think that when you're sick a little bit, just a little bit, it gives us room to complain. It gives us room in the space, because you're not that ill, to think about, woe is me, how hard life is. And so as I was preparing for this sermon a couple weeks ago, I was thinking about, man, this is just so hard.

And life is just so hard. I am in the midst of difficulty, not even thinking about all those times that I've done things that are really, really hard, or the people that are actually really, really suffering. Instead, you kind of go into your own little pain cave, and I reside in that cave, and let no one in. And don't take encouragement from anyone else or correction.

[5 : 16] I think that's what the man flu is. But if you've been with us for these last couple weeks, Jonathan started off our new year by talking about how difficult it was to walk the Christian life.

And what are you going to do in those times of trouble? Are you going to fold? Are you going to fold to the man flu? Are you going to fold to your emotions?

Or are we going to trust in the Lord? Here in this text this morning, we have a very clear explanation of emotions, of our emotional state and frame, and what to do in the Christian life with it.

And that kind of creates a difficult situation for many of us, because we don't know how to reconcile these great truths of the gospel, the truth of God's word, and how we feel.

And by me even saying that, some of us here are going, I don't even have a category for that. I'm an engineer, or I'm a construction person, or I love math, right?

[6 : 20] But God's word speaks to us, whether we're an artist, or whether we use only one side of our brain exclusively. He meets us in the midst of all of that.

And Jonathan did a great job of challenging us a couple weeks ago and saying, when those times come, what are you going to do? Now, one of those times is here, we can see in David's life.

What does David do? He doesn't shut any of those emotions out. In fact, he embraces them. And as we'll see in a few minutes, he redirects them towards the Lord.

You see, oftentimes in our Christian experience, we've been tricked, or maybe we trick ourselves into thinking, if I feel a certain way, then I might not be a Christian.

If I doubt God's goodness, or bad things are happening to me, maybe a little worse than the man flu, right, actual sickness, actual hurt, then where do I turn?

[7 : 22] How do I respond? Well, we've tricked ourselves into thinking that feelings have no place at all in the Christian life. I must be happy and joyful all the time.

Every time. And when we come to a text of scripture like this, we don't know what to do, because that doesn't seem so happy and joyful, does it? What do we do when we face those challenges? Is something wrong with me? Am I off? When you feel as if, if I just had one more thing, if I had to bear one more trial, it would all fall apart.

Maybe stress is mounting at work, at home, there's relationships that need to be fixed. When we look at our checkbooks, or our online banking account, we think, I don't even know how I'm going to make it.

When we really want to restore that relationship with a parent, a friend, a neighbor, and we don't know how it's going to happen. Or, you feel the anger rising in you because you've been slighted once again.

[8 : 35] Maybe it's by your own children, or maybe it's the infamous, per my last email at work. Right? That one always gets me.

And it makes my blood boil. But when I respond with anger, is that right? Maybe it's not anger, but sadness.

You can't wait for the Christmas season to be over because it's not one of joy, but of sadness. And you can't wait to go back to what is normal.

Or you look out and you see the joy in so many others, and you think, it doesn't reside in here, and why not? The problem is not that these feelings exist, and we've all felt some version of them at some point.

But we need to know what to do with them. Or as one has put it, we expect the world to not have much time for weakness.

[9 : 39] Especially the weakness of the psalmist's cries. That makes sense. But even in the church, we have drunk so deeply at the well of modern, Western materialism that we simply don't know what to do with such cries.

And we regard them as little more than embarrassing. Here we have in Scripture David crying out to God. And we don't know what to do with it.

Because it's not going swimmingly, it's not happy, it's not well. But because of God, we'll see this. We'll see that we can cry out to Him for deliverance.

We can cry out to Him for instruction. We can cry out to Him for forgiveness. forgiveness because of God. Whether we have the man flu or whether we're facing death itself, that we can cry out to God.

This morning, as I mentioned, we're starting a little kind of mini-series in the Psalms. We'll have a number of Psalms that we go through in the next month, and we'll see that the full spectrum of emotion is on display.

[10:57] It ain't always happy. And we're forced to confront this idea that in Scripture we have this thing called lament. It's more than just being sad.

Because if it was just being sad, you'd be stuck there with the man flu or whatever else is going on. But it redirects us back to God. And that's what we have before us.

David's lament not over things that were in the hands of his enemies. He's got those, and we'll see those in successive weeks. He's got real enemies who really want to kill him, to really put him in the grave.

But David here seems to be crying out over something else, even though he calls it his enemies. It's kind of his own sin. And David and Israel that followed after him used this in worship.

They used it as a means by which to cry out to God and say, we need your help. Now, as we may well know, there's strong emotions in life.

[11:59] There's strong emotions in the Christian life. And those feelings oftentimes can overtake what we see as clarity or logic or progression of thought.

But it doesn't mean that they're not there. It just means that the emotions are what's driving it, not an orderliness. Think about what we've just come from in Romans, right?

Paul is systematically explaining the outworkings of the gospel. And here, we can feel David is doing something very different.

That doesn't mean, though, that there's not a structure or an orderliness to it. And we can sense that because it seems like he's returning again and again to some themes. But what are those themes and how do we appropriate that?

Like, how do we figure out what exactly is going on? Now, I'll tell you this. Logic is present, but the experience of David's life is what's driving and organizing this.

[12:59] Now, in a psalm like Psalm 25, there is a structure, but it's not apparent to us because we're reading in English, to be quite frank. Now, and there's some psalms that have a structure to it where they take something like who remembers dare from your younger years if you're, or, maybe your older years.

We have a word, right? I think it's drug abuse resistance education. I think that's right. And that word also stands for every part of that organization.

Now, in a psalm like Psalm 25, it's not dare, but it takes the alphabet, the Hebrew alphabet, and it organizes things based on that first letter of every line in order.

So, it'd be like A, B, C, D, E, F, right? All the way down to Z. So, there's an organization to it. It's just not emanating from us. But then, the author, so David is kind of organizing all of this to follow in sequence with that alphabet.

But it's not apparent to us, but we can feel. There's some organization behind it, but I can't put my finger on it. So, that's what David's doing here. Now, as we'll see, they're in a kind of pattern, not just from start to beginning, but it moves towards something in the middle.

[14:16] Okay? And so, imagine the letter X where at opposite ends, you have something that couldn't be further from each other. And then, as you move towards the middle, they do what?

They get closer. They get closer until you get to that inflection point when that central theme is everything around which it spins. Okay?

And that's what we have here today. So, as it starts at the beginning and the end, those two match. And then, as they go closer or up, those two match.

And then, those match. And then, they go to one central theme. And that central theme this morning is God, quite frankly. And we'll see that in a minute. So, we're marching on this way to this idea that God is at the center of even these emotions.

And so, David's experience will unpack and drive towards God, David's experience towards God. But first, he pleads for what? He pleads for deliverance from his enemies.

[15:18] That's a normal thing in the Psalms, right? Look back with me at verse one. To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. And then he continues in verse two.

O God, in you I trust. Let me not be put to shame. Let not my enemies exult over me. We see in this first part of the Psalm, there's a reference point.

It's a reference point. I already gave the answer to the test that it's all driving towards God. But even in the midst of this battle with his enemies, God is the reference point by which he interprets everything that's going on.

He starts there and then we're going to end there as well. Now, think about how often we hear about emotions, especially anger. We're told what?

That maybe if you're a teenage boy that you should just go and let those emotions out, right? Just yell it out. There is some goodness to that sometimes. But what happens at the end of that?

[16:17] You're going to come back and do it again. And it's kind of like a muscle. Maybe one week you're lifting the five pound anger weight and then the next week you're lifting the 50 pound anger weight because it doesn't have an effect anymore.

It's a muscle that keeps working. But that's not what David does here, is it? In the midst of his enemies, in the midst of his emotions, he isn't submitting himself to nothing.

There's a reference point of God. He's the focal point. But he's not the recipient of that anger. But in the midst of that, that is his more.

That is the thing he is tied to and returns to. Think of a lighthouse and a storm. That's the thing that gives him hope. It's an affirmation of who God is and then it's a plea based on that relationship which we'll see in a minute.

There's a very real sense in which David is under some type of oppression. I mentioned this before. We don't know exactly what it is. It could very well be physical danger. David has a lot of that.

[17:24] Think of some of the Psalms that we know when he's on the run from people that want to kill him. Psalm 34 is very much in that vein. He doesn't tell us exactly though who these enemies are or what they're trying to do.

We just know that they are after him. But he is going back to that source, to that reference point for a plea for deliverance. He's begging for deliverance.

And for us as the reader, this seems natural to go to the Lord. After all, what else do you have? But this reason is not based just because we're great theologians, but it's based on the witness of Scripture.

Think about what comes before Psalm 25. Yes, Psalm 24. I know that part. And Psalm 23. But what's in those that makes David in this work go straight back to the Lord?

We have these laments where we cry out to God, but why is he so quick to go back to the Lord when our experience is anything but? Well, he goes back to him because he knows that is true.

[18:32] What comes before is, yes, Psalm 24 and Psalm 23. That one's familiar to us, right? This declaration of who God is in the midst of darkness. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, what?

I fear no evil because God's presence is there. God leads them. God delivers them. But he's also the king in Psalm 24. This king of glory.

Everything on the earth belongs to him. Everything. This is the same God who in Psalm 23 is referenced as leading his people because what?

In the Exodus, God is the one who delivers them and leads his people out of it. He's the shepherd not caring for the little fluffy cute sheep, right? that simply bah and mine their master.

But he's the shepherd steering wayward children that are mindless and complaining and murmuring and doing all those bad and nasty things and saying, why can't we go back to Egypt?

[19:34] That same shepherd idea is the one who in Psalm 23 is doing those things and he's doing that because he did it in the Exodus as well. He's a warrior that fights on behalf of his people when what?

When Pharaoh's army rises up, God is the one who leads them. God is the one who delivers them. And that's why David can say with confidence, to you, oh God, I lift up my soul.

In you I trust. In the midst of disaster and war, David returns again to God, the God who had delivered his people again.

Let's go back to those enemies. Who are those enemies? We don't know who they are. But whatever it is, it's causing David to cry out and say, he's on the run again but from this time we don't know what it is.

It's very generic though. But we know that these enemies pop up again. Remember what I told you about that picture of the X. They come back again at the end of Psalm 25.

[20 : 40] Look at verse 19 with me. Consider how many are my foes and with what violent hatred they hate me. Oh guard my soul and deliver me. Let me not be put to shame.

They come back again. David is pleading and is asking with God, pleading for deliverance. He's saying, listen, Lord, I need your help.

They want to destroy me. And God answers him. Be gracious, look upon my affliction and deliver me again. Now if you'll note, there's a lot of action verbs in here.

Right? Think about this. Turn to me. Be gracious. Look upon my affliction. Take away my sin. Guard my life. Rescue me.

Let me not be put to shame. They almost come with those graphics and cartoons, right? With the bubbles and the like, pow and bam. But it ain't David who's doing that.

[21 : 41] It's God who's doing it. God and not David is at work. God is at work even in the presence of his enemies, both yours and David's.

But we get a small glimpse at who this enemy is. It's not one that does battle simply with swords and chariots and military might.

The one that David battles against, he fights with uprightness, integrity, and hope. And for that battle, David has nowhere else to turn but back to the deliverer.

For he is the only one that can release from the snare of sin, that can free from anguish, that can cure loneliness and affliction. My eyes are ever on the Lord for only he will release my feet.

Turn and be gracious to me. David's cry for deliverance is back towards the Lord from the hands of his enemies. That's the only thing he can ask for.

[22 : 48] Now as we move from those outside parts, we're moving a little closer. What's the next thing that David asks for? He asks for guidance or instruction. Really, he doesn't ask for it.

He begs for it. Sometimes when we think guidance, we think of like a scene from Andy Griffith, right? Where the little boy, Opie, he asks his dad, oh man, I have this like situation at school, this minor moral dilemma, if it's even a moral dilemma.

And oftentimes they're fishing. I love Andy Griffith and I love fishing. That's not a commentary on it. But then Andy will say, well, you remember something like this. And there's a sense of nostalgia for something like that.

Where it's a bestowal of wisdom that we already kind of knew but we needed a father figure to turn us back to that. That's not what's going on here. That is not the picture that David has of asking for guidance in the midst of trouble.

It's not like an, oh shucks, Andy, I knew that anyway. This is a crying out in the midst of darkness and chaos. I don't know what to do. Lord, help me.

[23 : 56] We see that again in the Gospels too. Lord, help me in the midst of my unbelief. He's begging for help. Look at verses four through six.

Make known to me your ways, oh Lord. Teach me your past. Lead me in your truth and teach me for you are the God of my salvation for I will wait all the day long. Remember your mercy, oh Lord, and your steadfast love for they have been of old.

We don't see that very often. We're told often in our day and age and even sometimes we function like this. If we need wisdom, we just need to silence ourselves.

Silence all the distractions and all the noises and if I get alone by myself, I can think clearly. I know what to do. That says that the answer arises from within us.

In David's experience, I'm not against silence and I'm not against being by myself. I'm a little bit on the introvert scale. But David is saying, hey, this instruction, this guidance, this clarity is not coming inside of me, from inside of me.

[25 : 09] It's coming from the Lord. That the Lord is giving him guidance. The Lord is the one that's working in his life. Our innermost being is not the thing that's going to guide us, but God speaking to us.

Again, he's the one that's active. He is the one that's teaching. He is the one that's showing. He is the one that's delivering us. It's a street fight for truth in our own hearts and minds.

And the Lord is the one doing battle. But David, in doing this, is submitting to the will of his Father and asking to be led, to be shown.

It's kind of like when we have a house and we decorate it and organize it in such a way. We're asking the Lord to come in and rearrange the furniture and throw things in the dumpster and to reorient everything.

That's what David is doing. We're not asking him just to clean up the dust bunnies. We're asking him to reorganize and reorient our lives according to his principles.

[26 : 17] Imagine in the midst of difficulty and trial, not wallowing in grief, kind of like pigs. Pigs love mud. They roll back and forth and they wallow in mud.

We do that sometimes in our emotional state when things are hard. We don't go to the Lord. We just roll around in it. We think about anxiety and sadness and fear and they're our companions and we act like Israel in the Exodus.

We complain and murmur about it with things that are maybe bigger than the man flu. But David's example is showing us to go back to the Lord and to ask him in the midst of that for guidance.

Show us the way O Lord. But we also have that promise that God is going to do something, that he is going to be at work. Look at verse 12. Who is the man who fears the Lord?

He will instruct him or him will he instruct in the way that he should choose. There's a pleading and then there's a promise. But that promise, we don't know the timing of the answer but we know that he answers, that he will instruct him, he will answer him.

[27 : 31] But that guidance is formed by relationship. The answer that's been given to David flows out of this relationship with this covenant keeping God. Remember, this is the same God that promised that he would be their God and they would be his people.

That's the ground of assurance that David has. That he knows it will come to pass. He knows that he will have an answer because he has fellowship with God.

And that relationship is good. Look at verse 13. His soul shall abide in well-being. His offering shall inherit the land. 14. The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him and makes known his covenant.

Guidance and instruction is the outworking of our relationship with God. When we plead for him to answer, it's because he is near to us.

It flows out of this relationship that we had with the Lord. And we get a small glimpse of that here in Psalm 25. Now we know David has pled for what?

[28 : 38] He's pled for all these things up until this point. He's pled for deliverance from enemies. He's asked for guidance because of this relationship. But what else does he ask for?

Again, we're moving closer and closer to that inflection point. He's asking for forgiveness. We saw a hint of that in verse 6. Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from old.

He continues on. Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions according to your steadfast love. Remember me for the sake of your goodness. It's not simply a statement of God's mercy.

It is that, but it's saying remember how you've worked in the past. God, you've done these things in the past. Do them again. May it continue.

It's an outworking of that covenant promise to God's people. It's taking Israel's history and saying, hey, remember how you've dealt with Abraham. He sinned, but you were so gracious to him.

[29 : 41] Remember not just Abraham, but remember Isaac. Remember Jacob. Remember your people, Israel, how you've dealt with them. Remember me according to that same love.

David is pleading with the Lord to do the same. If we see the pattern here, he pleads for these things and then he answers these things in the same way. But most of all, he asked, remember not my sin.

David is keenly aware of his sin in this moment. I think that's who the enemy is. The fact that he's dealing with a struggle against his own flesh and the devil. And we've circled around to the fact that David is back in this bad spot.

He needs guidance, yes, he needs deliverance from that, but he is really aware that he's a sinner. He knows that he needs a redeemer. And in that moment, he knows that he needs God.

He's looking back over his youth and saying, don't deal with me according to all those things. And he has these very acute points, if you know the life of David, where he's aware that he is a sinner,

the gravity of what he's done.

[30 : 50] And he knows that he needs a deliverer. He knows he needs a redeemer. But he's asking the Lord not to look on that, but look back on love. Remember what you have done to your people.

As a pastor, I'm often privileged to see this picture. Remember your promise to love. And I see it most often in marriages, but not on the wedding day.

But when things are really dark and things are really bad, and there seems like there's no hope, and oftentimes what is said, even with people that don't confess Christ, I remember, remember that you promised to love me.

I've heard that on more than one occasion, and I'm always struck by that because that is the picture that we are claiming of God, except for he has never stopped loving us.

in spite of our sin. And David is pleading that promise on his own behalf. But we have that assurance, again, the pleading for it, but the assurance of forgiveness.

[31 : 58] Look at verse 11. For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great. There's a sense of expectation that David has because he's dealing with his people.

He says, because of the covenant, because of the promise, do these things. Not because of anything in myself, but because of what you have done. The same is true in the gospel.

That we are not claiming eternal life on anything that we have done. This message that we have in the good news of Jesus is because of your love, O Lord, because of who you are, because of your promise that we should love.

Please love us because of that. There's a comfort and that forgiveness when we know that we are in Christ, that God is faithful to his promise because of his covenant.

So David can call for deliverance. He can call for guidance. He can even call for forgiveness. But that center point, that inflection of this whole psalm is God himself. Look with me at verses 8 and 10.

[33 : 08] Good and upright is the Lord, therefore he instructs the sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right. He teaches the humble his way. And all the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

We can feel that because it's not to you, O Lord. We see that it's kind of like in third person now. It's about God himself. He is the center point of all of what's going on.

He's the center point of David's life, even in the midst of not knowing how to feel or what to do, but he's also the center point of this text. It's a shift, not pleading, but statements about God, who he is. The difficulty though, we know this from our experiences, we can gloss over that really quickly. We can be consumed by how we feel in the moment, but David is encouraging us to go back to that reference point, to God himself.

himself, who's at the center because he's not silent, he is not absent. In fact, he is the one delivering, giving guidance, and even forgiving sin.

[34 : 22] And that's the beauty of the Savior. That's the beauty of Jesus, the fact that we have Christ who intercedes even now, that God has sent his son to be the focal point of our lives.

I've kind of made a big deal throughout this sermon about the structure of Psalm 25. Now, not every Psalm is structured like this, but the ones that are, it's very telling when it doesn't follow that model. There's one part that doesn't follow this whole model, and it's the last verse. Redeem Israel, O God, out of his troubles. It's a misstep in this flow.

But in that misstep, we see that it's not just David's experience. It's the experience of God's people. This calling back for God to be the center point of our lives.

So that we might cry in the midst of storm for deliverance, ask for instruction, but most of all, we are crying and asking the Lord to be the focus of our lives.

[35 : 27] May we do that this day. Let's pray. Lord, we are thankful for the reminder from your word of your promises in Scripture. We ask that you might remind us, even now, that you are to be the focal point of our lives, that we are offered forgiveness in the gospel.

May we plead for it, and Father, may we be assured of it. In our times of trouble and distress, may you give us instruction. May we plead for it. May you grant us it.

And Father, even in the presence of our enemies, just like your servant David, may we plead for deliverance, and may we be assured of it in all these things because of what Christ has done.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.