

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 4 August 2013

No. T0792

Speaker: Mr. Ian Britton

Meditations in the Psalms: Psalm 25:1-22 - Teach me Thy way, O LORD

My children are growing up. In fact, at fifteen and sixteen they are rapidly becoming young adults rather than children. As such, they are becoming increasingly independent. That is normal and healthy. Eventually they will leave home and set up homes and have families of their own. Continued dependence is not a healthy thing; it is a sign of immaturity or illness. Growing independence is the proper pattern for young people, although they certainly need to learn to use that independence wisely! However, this is **not** the pattern for the Christian's maturing relationship with his heavenly Father. That relationship certainly must grow, develop and mature in many ways, but independence is not one of them. The model for our relationship with our Father is that between Jesus on earth with His Father in heaven. That relationship was always marked by total dependence. As we study Psalm 25, we will see David, the author, expressing, time and again, his dependence on God. In doing so, David does not demonstrate his immaturity. On the contrary, he shows that his experience of God has been genuine, because it has taught him to rely completely on God.

The Psalm divides up into three sections as follows:

1. David makes requests to God, primarily for himself (Psalm 25:1-7)
2. Encouragement, addressed to others, for them to trust in God (Psalm 25:8-15)
3. More personal requests of David to God (Psalm 25:16-22)

I will read each section of the Psalm before I speak about it briefly.

1. David makes requests to God, primarily for himself (Psalm 25:1-7)

"To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in You; let me not be ashamed; let not my enemies triumph over me. Indeed, let no one who waits on You be ashamed; let those be ashamed who deal treacherously without cause. Show me Your ways, O LORD; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me. For You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day. Remember, O LORD, Your tender mercies and Your lovingkindnesses, for they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to Your mercy remember me, for Your goodness' sake, O LORD." (Psalm 25:1-7)

This first section divides naturally again into three subsections:

- a. Who should, and should not, be ashamed (Psalm 25:1-3)
- b. Requests for instruction from God (Psalm 25:4-5)
- c. Requests for God to remember and not remember (Psalm 25:6-7)

The mathematically inclined will be interested to see that each of these three subsections has a group of three points!

a. Not ashamed, not ashamed, ashamed (Psalm 25:1-3)

David begins by addressing God directly and telling Him that he is lifting up his soul to Him (Psalm 25:1). Immediately then, David turns in dependence to God and states plainly that he trusts in God (Psalm 25:2). The first actual request is that God will not let him be ashamed (Psalm 25:2). Put another way, he asks that God will honour the confidence that David has placed in Him. The psalmist has enemies (Psalm 25:2) and they would love to see him fall down, and have his confidence in God shattered. Although this section is primarily filled with David's personal requests, he reaches out at this point and asks that God will not let **anybody** who trusts in Him be ashamed (Psalm 25:3). The people who **should** be ashamed are those (probably the same group as David's enemies) who deal dishonestly and unfairly.

We can probably all think of people who are glad to see Christians brought down by personal failure, or just disappointment in some area where they were trusting in God. Such people look for reasons to triumph over believers, because it lets them belittle Christianity and Christ Himself. David gives us a good example in praying for ourselves,

and other Christians, that we might never be ashamed of our trust in God (Psalm 25:3). The God of justice and righteousness will ultimately ensure that those who do shameful things will be brought to shame.

b. Show, teach, lead (Psalm 25:4-5)

This subsection has a threefold request that God show, teach and lead. *“Show me Your ways”* (Psalm 25:4). A request to see. We might call it a request for information. David wants to see what God’s ways look like. We might reasonably understand the expression ‘God’s ways’ to have one of two meanings. The first would be the ways that God Himself acts. So we would understand ways of righteousness, holiness, justice etc. The second way would be to think of the ways that God wants David to walk in. The next clause will make plain that David is not just interested in God’s ways as an abstract concept, but as something he wants to emulate. Ultimately the two meanings are connected anyway; the ways that God wants us to walk in are marked by the characteristics of God’s own ways.

“Teach me Your paths” (Psalm 25:4). A request for instruction. We might call it a request for knowledge. It is certainly a bit more than just seeing. Just as information becomes knowledge when we start to apply it and understand how it works in practice, so David wants a deeper understanding of God’s paths that only God can provide.

“Lead me in Your truth and teach me” (Psalm 25:5) It is now crystal clear that David wants more than to just understand how God Himself acts. He wants to be taught by God in practical ways, putting into action what he knows. David recognises that he can’t just get the knowledge from God and then do all the practical bits by himself. David needs God to lead him, if he is to have any chance of walking in truth. We too need to remember the absolute necessity of putting into practice the things that we learn from God’s word. Christianity is not an academic discipline where we just acquire more and more facts about God, without them having any real impact on the way we live. God only displays His ways to those who are genuinely interested in walking in them. Study and contemplation are essential parts of Christianity. That’s what we are trying to do this morning, but they are not ends in themselves, and cannot stand alone. ‘Show’ and ‘teach’ must carry on to become ‘lead’, or we will make no progress at all in knowing God.

David concludes this subsection by reminding himself again that it is God who is his salvation, and David is happy, and totally obliged, to wait on God *“all the day”* (Psalm 25:5).

c. Remember, don’t remember, remember (Psalm 25:6-7)

Many prayers in the Bible are based on something that God has previously revealed - a promise or an aspect of His character. A good example is the prayer of Moses in Numbers 14:13-19, where Moses explicitly bases His requests on what he already knows about God and the way He acts. Here, David bases his prayer on the grounds of God’s mercy and loving kindness. God has shown these qualities many times in the past (*“from of old”*, as Psalm 25:6 says), and David frankly asks that God **remember** these things, and act in that way once again. This is a helpful model for our own prayers. When you pray, see what scriptural grounds there are for making a particular request. If you can’t think of any, perhaps you need to think again about what you are asking for!

If David wants God to **remember** God’s own history, he **doesn’t** want Him to **remember** all the details of David’s own history! (See Psalm 25:7). David acknowledges his sins, but asks that God will not bring them back to mind, that is, hand out the punishment they deserve and refuse to answer David’s prayers. We can readily join with David in this request! Which of us would want God to remember, and review, all the sins and transgressions of our youth? Are we as ready to forget other people’s historical failures as we are our own?

But David certainly doesn’t want to be forgotten by God. He wants God to **remember** him in mercy (Psalm 25:7). He wants God to show him the mercy that the LORD has shown to His people in the past, and he makes the request, not on the grounds of justice, but on the goodness of God. We make our pleas on the same basis today.

2. Encouragement, addressed to others, for them to trust in God (Psalm 25:8-15)

Now let’s read the second section, Psalm 25:8-15: *“Good and upright is the LORD; therefore He teaches sinners in the way. The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way. All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to such as keep His covenant and His testimonies. For Your name’s sake, O LORD, pardon my iniquity, for it is great. Who is the man that fears the LORD? Him shall He teach in the way He chooses. He himself shall dwell in prosperity, and his descendants shall inherit the earth. The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant. My eyes are ever toward the LORD, for He shall pluck my feet out of the net”* (Psalm 25:8-15).

In Psalm 25:8-15, David isn’t speaking directly to God. Rather, he is speaking about God, describing Him in ways that are designed to encourage others to trust in Him, i.e. to show their dependence on God.

The first clause of this section describes God as “*good and upright*” (Psalm 25:8). We might think that would make Him the avenger or judge of sinners, but David says He is the Teacher of sinners (Psalm 25:8). Plainly, David means sinners who really want to please God (like himself), not sinners who are content to keep on sinning. Psalm 25:8 reminds us of Psalm 25:4-5. In Psalm 25:4-5 David spoke about God, showing, teaching and leading him. Now He describes God showing the same attitude to others who turn to Him. The one characteristic specifically mentioned is justice (Psalm 25:9). This is probably in contrast to the treachery mentioned in Psalm 25:3, but it certainly picks up a very clear line of thought in the Bible, that God loves justice and delights to see His people act that way, and is very displeased with those who do not. We mustn't miss the double reference to the humble here (Psalm 25:9). The humble person is far more likely to recognise his dependence on God than the proud. Ten seconds in the conscious presence of the Mighty God will be more than sufficient to remind us just how humble we really are next to Him. The proud man doesn't know himself very well, and doesn't really know God at all, or at least has thoroughly forgotten what he does know of Him.

David says that “*all the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth*” (Psalm 25:10). At least, that is how God shows Himself to those who obey Him. This gives us some clear guidance as to how we should act if we wish to walk in God's paths. Do mercy and truth clearly characterise how I live?

At this point David seems to remember his own sinfulness again, and that he has **not** always kept God's commands. He breaks off his remarks to other people for a moment, and addresses himself directly to God once more, with another request for pardon. We don't know at what point in David's life this psalm was written, so we cannot know whether the sins David remembers are those with Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Samuel 11:1-12:23), or some less serious ones. However, everybody who has learnt from God what his own character and failings are, will always consider his own iniquity to be “*great*” (Psalm 25:11).

Going back to addressing other people, David states that if anyone fears, that is respects or reverences, God, then God will teach that person in the way God chooses (Psalm 25:12). We might understand that to mean in the **path** God chooses, or in the **manner** God chooses. The former seems more likely, but either would be quite true.

We must not lift Psalm 25:13 out of context, and base some form of 'prosperity gospel' on it. Remember, that David wrote in a period when material benefits were often a sign of God's blessing and, as the king of a physical country, he wanted descendants to reign after him. We are **not** promised wealth for ourselves and a multitude of wealthy children! Rather, we are promised the eternal, spiritual blessings that God offers today through Christ Jesus (see Ephesians 1:3-14). In reality, these are far more valuable than the material wealth that we so often wish for.

Understanding the deep things of God doesn't come from superior intelligence or higher academic qualifications. Psalm 25:14 says it comes from fear of the LORD. No doubt, this fear of the LORD will lead to a desire to know God better, and that may very quickly lead to study and learning. But the fear and love of God come first and are primary. The reference to God showing them His covenant reminds us that God is faithful to His promises to His people in every generation.

At the close of this section, David tells us about the lessons he has learned from his own experience. He has always had his eyes on God, that is, looked to Him in dependence, and his experience is that God has kept him from the traps that his enemies have set for him. The implication is that others (including us) should learn to trust and depend on God also.

3. More personal requests of David to God (Psalm 25:16-22)

Now let's read the third and final section of Psalm 25. “*Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me, for I am desolate and afflicted. The troubles of my heart have enlarged; bring me out of my distresses! Look on my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins. Consider my enemies, for they are many; and they hate me with cruel hatred. Keep my soul, and deliver me; let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in You. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for You. Redeem Israel, O God, out of all their troubles!*” (Psalm 25:16-22)

Having made encouraging remarks to other people about his own personal experience of God's salvation, David now returns to praying to God on his own behalf. David feels that God has turned His back on him and asks the Lord to turn towards him again in mercy. At the end of the previous section, David had said that his own eyes are always turned towards God (Psalm 25:15); now he wants the LORD to return the look! (Psalm 25:16) The psalmist has nobody to turn to, and nothing but trouble (Psalm 25:16). I am certain we have all had times in our lives when we have felt this way. Everything is desolation and affliction, and it feels as if God has turned the other way. At such times, openness and honesty with God about how we feel are a good start towards experiencing His closeness again. David had clearly had troubles before, but now they have increased, and they seem to be more than just physical difficulties; they are “*troubles of [the] heart*” (Psalm 25:17). He knows that God can bring him out of these troubles, if He wishes,

and David asks for exactly that (Psalm 25:17). When God answers David's first request, and turns to look at him, He will see David's affliction and pain. Perhaps David is thinking of how God once said about the troubles of Israel in Egypt "*I have seen..., I have heard..., I know... [and] I have come down to deliver them*" Exodus 3:7-8. He certainly wants that experience for himself. But David also knows that when God looks at him, He will also see David's sins, so he asks, once again, for forgiveness.

David wants God to take a good look at his enemies as well! (Psalm 25:19). There are many of them, and they hate David with a particularly cruel and violent hatred. Clearly we don't add to God's knowledge when we tell Him about our troubles, neither does He really turn away so that we have to ask Him to literally turn back and take notice. David is fully in line with other prayers recorded in the Bible that use this kind of figurative language to describe what they want God to do. We should never let a belief in the all knowing God discourage us from telling Him our difficulties.

Lacking resources of his own, David asks God to protect his soul and deliver him from his enemies (Psalm 25:20). Going right back to his first request (Psalm 25:2), he asks again that God will not let him be ashamed (Psalm 25:20), because he has put his trust in God. Rather than his dependence being a source of shame, David sees it as his one hope of **not** being ashamed.

Once again David's integrity and uprightness are contrasted with the character of his enemies. And he asks that these characteristics might provide some kind of preservation for him (Psalm 25:21). This doesn't mean that David is relying on his good track record! His confidence comes from the fact that he is waiting for God.

Finally, David looks outwards again from his own concerns, and his final request is that God will redeem the whole nation out of all their troubles (Psalm 25:22). We shouldn't mistake this for the kind of vague prayers that we sometimes make that "God will bless all His children"! What David does is to extend his own longing for God's salvation to become a longing for the same thing for all God's people. His problems remind him that others have difficulties as well. His prayers for his own release become prayers for the release of others. His own dependence on God leads him to want that for all God's people. May our concerns and prayers for ourselves have the same effect in our lives as they seem to have had in David's!

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.