

Prayers

To God

We praise You, Lord God for the power of Your Word, which reaches through time and space to bring love and comfort to millions of people. We praise You for the riches of the Bible, and for its great variety of literature by which all manner of people may come to know Your will and Your guidance for their lives. We praise You, Lord God, for You have provided all we need in order to get to know you very well. **AMEN**

For myself

Weekly theme: social media

Pray for all who are hooked on social media and spend far too much time with it, unable to face the truth of real personal dialogue and conversation.

For others

Pray for those who struggle with faith because they have been badly advised or badly ministered to. There are unfortunately too many of them, but that does not stop God from working to draw back His own children; pray for them.

Meditation

When quietness descends upon me, Lord,
And everything that seemed important fades away;
I'm left to think about my faith and my commitment,
And ask, what is there between You and me?

An issue to be dealt with? Perhaps there is?
Dear Jesus, please give me the help I need:
Is there a sin to be laid at the foot of the cross?
Tell me, Lord, about what I must do:
Are there Inappropriate feelings to be thrown away?
Then I must face this in Your strength:
Is there a matter of faith which I cannot understand?
Then, help me, Jesus, so I may learn from you:
And if I persist in holding on to something more than You?
Convict me of my sin, Lord God, I pray !

Lord Jesus, I strive to say in honesty, 'I Love You' . . .
Come, apply the Gospel to my wayward soul,

And clear out all that stands between us painfully,
And liberate me by truth, by the Gospel of eternal love.

Bible Passage

Psalm 25:1-10

Of David.

- ¹ I lift up my soul to You, O LORD;
² O my God, I trust in You.
Do not let me be disgraced;
do not let my enemies triumph over me.
- ³ For no-one who waits for You
will be made to suffer shame;
but those who are treacherous without reason
will be made to feel ashamed.
- ⁴ Show me Your ways, O LORD,
teach me Your paths;
- ⁵ Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
for You are the God of my salvation,
and I wait for You all my days.
- ⁶ Remember Your mercy and faithful love,
O LORD, for they are from of old.
- ⁷ Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellion,
but remember me according to Your faithful love,
for You are good, O LORD.
- ⁸ The Lord is good and upright;
He therefore teaches sinners about His ways.
- ⁹ He guides the humble in what is right
and teaches them His way.
- ¹⁰ All the ways of the LORD are faithful and true
for those who keep the requirements of His Covenant.

Review

As we read Psalm 25, it comes across as a wonderful poem about trust in God. It describes our hope in His salvation, and deliverance from our enemies (25:2,19). We will study this psalm in two halves; verses 1-10 today, and verses 11-22 tomorrow. The closer we look at this psalm, the more we see. It is very intense, and contains much comment on the life of faith, in particular God's Covenant relationship with His people (see 25:10). This Covenant has now been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, but it is still central to our relationship with God, and the spiritual advice within this psalm about how to handle sin, guilt and shame for example remains powerfully important. If we think of Jesus whenever the Psalmist talks of 'the Lord', then we will not find it hard to connect this Psalm with the Christian life of faith.

The clear theme of the first ten verses is that of a secure and confident relationship with God, something that was the privilege of Israel, but is now ours through Jesus Christ. We honour Him and trust in Him (25:1,2), and ask Him to protect us from our enemies and from the shame of our suffering when we cannot understand it (25:2,3). Our only defence against life's troubles is to keep closely to the truths of the faith we have been taught (25:4,5) and to trust God. Importantly, verses 5 and 6 remind us that the true basis of our faith is God's '*faithful love*', otherwise called His '*covenant love*', which has defined His attitude towards all people ever since the flood, after which God promised never to kill people again because of their sin (Genesis 9:15). In return, God asks us to keep faith with Him and be obedient to His will, which no longer means keeping the Laws of Moses (Exodus 20f.) but living by faith in Jesus Christ.

In verse 7, the psalm asks God not to remember '*the sins of our youth*' and our '*rebellion*' (25:7). This is a profoundly important plea, for all of us remember that in our youth, we did things of which we may not be proud today. As we grew up, all manner of things happened to each of us from which we learned the lessons of life, and we mostly forget much of what happened then, especially the earlier years of our childhood. But we cannot escape the fact that these things have affected our lives for good and ill. So it is a wise prayer to ask the Lord to deal with the consequences of this often forgotten past. The Lord deals graciously with us if we will be honest with Him. This is just one helpful point within this psalm, and it has much more to teach us.

Going Deeper

A Hebrew acrostic!

Before we start, however, it is worth noting that the whole of Psalm 25 is held together in a special way. If you were to read the psalm in Hebrew, you would notice that it is one of nine within the whole Book of Psalms which uses the Hebrew alphabet as a guide. Each verse (more or less), starts with a letter of the alphabet, in due order. It was a good memory aid for use in days when few people had access to the written word, but by keeping to this Hebrew structure the psalm sometimes appears a little repetitive when translated into English; for example 'Show me Your ways, O LORD, teach me Your paths; Lead me in Your truth and teach me' (25:4,5). On the other hand, this characteristic of the psalm gives it a very poetic feel, perhaps more than many other psalms.

Getting to the heart of it

It is easy to read this psalm and lose track of what is going on, and then resort to taking individual verses and applying them to our own circumstances without really connecting with the whole psalm and what God is saying through it. For example, the talk of '*enemies*' (25:2) reminds us of earlier psalms (4,5,6 for example) in which the believer seeks justice from God in the face of wrongful accusation. This however, is not what this psalm is about.

The words repeated most help us understand its message. '*Shame*' occurs three times in verse 2 and 3, and '*wait*' is repeated twice in verses 3 and 5 and is strongly implied in verses 6 and 10. Also, '*teach*' (instruct) occurs in verses 4,8,9, and other words for guidance or instruction in verses 5,8,9. Lastly, '*way*' or '*path*' occurs in verses 4,7,8 and 9, and '*remember*' occurs three times in verses 6 and 7. These words help us in our interpretation of this psalm, to realise that its message is about our walk with God, or what we call '*discipleship*'. More specifically, the way sound teaching and instruction can help us deal with the problems we experience, particularly those of '*shame*'.

Sin and Shame

Shame is a feeling that most people experience. It is full of paradox because, for example, it is a most uncomfortable feeling we would like to be without; but instinctively, we know that shame is important, for we are naturally suspicious of those who we think 'feel no shame'. Shame is best described as a feeling of humiliation due to a sense of having done something wrong or having offended someone. We feel shame when we realise the full implications of our sin, or when we realise that we have hurt someone or sinned against them inadvertently and without intent. In verse 2, the shame referred to is the second type, for the psalmist has not intended to do anything wrong, but is accused by someone else and afflicted by a sense of shame which comes purely from being concerned about what other people think. The Psalm tells us straight that whatever we may think or other people may think, we need have no shame before God.

Why is shame an issue? The truth is that when other people see that God has not answered the prayers we have made, then some think there must be something wrong with us otherwise God would have answered! Surely we must be impure! How much guilt do some people feel unnecessarily on this account! God does not see it that way. He hears our prayers and will answer in His time; what he wants is our discipleship, our desire to follow Him.

Walking in the ways of the Lord

The whole psalm goes on to give a variety of guidance about discipleship, all of which assists us in waiting on Him for the answers to our prayers. It says, '*for you are the God of my salvation, for you I wait all day long*' (25:5), which is all based on God's faithful Covenant love (25:10). It is as if the Lord says to us; '*stick to the ancient paths of truth that have always been available to my people*', rather than '*look, here is a different path I have made just for you*'. That is not to say that the Lord does not have individual guidance for us, but the path that He has for us must be consistent with how He has guided His disciples throughout the ages, and it is a '*narrow pathway*' (Matt 7:13,14). When we walk in God's ancient pathways, we can then ask Him whether there are any parts of them he wishes us to explore!

Persistence

The first truth of God's guidance pointed out by Psalm 25 is '*persistence*' (25:3,5). This quality means we do not give up in our prayers and are always willing to wait on the Lord, something highly prized in Scripture. In general, people indicate their priorities by speaking readily about what is on their minds; what then if we do not regularly and persistently speak to God about our deepest concerns? Jesus Himself reminds us of the importance of persistence in prayer in His parable about the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8).

Penitence

The second truth is penitence. In verse 7, the psalmist is concerned about the '*sins of my youth*', and what God does about them (see above). Whether we remember what has happened in the past or not, and whether or not we understand the full impact of our earlier lives, it is always wise to 'repent', and keep a repentant attitude towards the past. We do not always know the consequences of our actions, but God does, and although people readily say that the past is 'behind them', the evidence is that the world's influence upon young minds is a highly dominant factor in much trouble in our world, and we are all a part of this. For many people, repentance is an on-going process throughout life which needs much understanding and an abiding confidence in the love of God.

Obedience

The third truth is obedience. Verses 8 to 10 speak of the ways of the Lord, but it is no good talking about them, it is only worth being obedient to them. Too many Christians today believe that they can hang on to Christ by saying that they are 'Christians' but plainly do what they want in the world without reference to the moral values God has given us in His world or

traditionally through the Church. Where such attitudes persist, this lie keeps people bound in disobedience, and far from the faithfulness to God's paths of humility and love, expounded here in this psalm.

Discipleship

Application

Advice about discipleship

Walking in God's ways sometimes seems to be too complex or difficult. Psalm 25 offers us some straightforward advice about how we do this. As each of us read this psalm, different things will come to mind, but the clues are all there about how we may overcome our problems. Shame felt because of other people's attitudes towards us can be overcome by being patient and waiting upon the Lord; uncertainty about what is right can be overcome by keeping in contact with the ancient and true paths of God's guidance to be found in Scripture, through Jesus Christ, and in the traditions of the church that have been handed down to us.

The faithfulness of God as we turn to Him

Perhaps the most valuable truth in this part of Psalm 25 is the assurance of the faithfulness of God and His love throughout all things. All too often, we hear of people who think that they have done something that is beyond what God can forgive, or they feel unworthy of being a Christian, or say that they cannot be 'good enough' to be a Christian. Our message must always be that following in God's ways is not something that is to do with how good we are, but only to do with how great and loving God is. He is always prepared to love and forgive anyone who turns to Him.

Ideas for what to do

- We must all consider whether we have learned ways of behaviour from our youth that have unduly affected our relationships with others and our relationship with God. In considering this carefully, we must be ready to repent
- If possible, talk to other people about some of the things brought to light in this study for you; and remember, the Lord is a God of truth and love.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. How big a problem is 'shame' amongst God's people? What ways can you think of to help people avoid presuming what others think of them?
2. Write a list of those things that you would consider to be the ancient paths or truths of God and of Christian faith.
3. How have you been affected by the 'sins of your youth'. Do they still persist? How are they best dealt with?

Final Prayer

You have called us O Lord, to take the Gospel to all the nations. Help us to take it with us wherever we go; and when You need us to say or do something for You; tell us in ways we understand. May we know Your guidance and have the courage to bear Your Gospel. Glory be to You O Lord. AMEN
