

A Prayer for Guidance

October 3, 2021 Sermon by Stephen Portner

Psalm 25

1Of David. To You, O Lord, I will lift up my soul.

אֲלֹדֹד אֵלַי יְהוָה נַפְשִׁי אֲשָׂא:

2My God, I trusted in You; let me not be ashamed. Nor shall my enemies rejoice over me.

**בְּאֱלֹהֵי בְּנֵי בִטְחֹתַי אֶל-אֲבוֹשָׁה אֶל-
יַעֲלֹצוּ אוֹיְבֵי לִי:**

3Neither shall any of those who hope for You be ashamed; let those who betray [to the extent of] destitution be ashamed.

**גַּם כָּל-קְוִיךָ לֹא יִבְשׁוּ יְבֹשׁוּ
הַבּוֹגְדִים רִיקָם:**

4O Lord, let me know Your ways; teach me Your paths.

**בְּדַרְכֶיךָ יְהוָה הוֹדִיעֵנִי אַרְחוֹתֶיךָ
לְמַדְנִי:**

5Direct me with Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; I hope for You all day long.

**בְּהַדְרִיכֵנִי בְּאֱמֹתֶךָ | וְלַמְדֵנִי כִי-
אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעֵי אֹתָךְ קִוִּיתִי כָל-
הַיּוֹם:**

6Remember Your mercies, O Lord, and Your kindnesses, for they have been since time immemorial.

**זְכַר-רַחֲמֶיךָ יְהוָה וְחַסְדֶיךָ כִּי
מֵעוֹלָם הֵמָּה:**

7The sins of my youth and my transgressions, do not remember; what is worthy of Your kindness, You remember for me, for the sake of Your goodness, O Lord.

**זַחֲטָאוֹת נְעוּרָי | וּפְשָׁעֵי אֶל-תִּזְכֹּר
כַּחֲסִדֶיךָ זְכַר-לִי-אַתָּה לְמַעַן טוֹבֶךָ
יְהוָה:**

8The Lord is good and upright; therefore, He leads sinners on the road.

**טוֹב וַיִּשֶׁר יְהוָה עַל-כֵּן יוֹרֵה
חַטָּאִים בְּדַרְךָ:**

9He leads the humble with just rules and He teaches the humble His way.

**טִי־דַרְךָ עֲנוּיִם בְּמִשְׁפָּט וְיִלְמַד עֲנוּיִם
דַּרְכּוֹ:**

10 All the Lord's ways are kindness and truth for those who keep His covenant and His testimonies.

יְכַל־אַרְחוֹת יְהוָה חֶסֶד וְאֱמֻנַת לְנוֹצְרֵי
בְרִיתוֹ וְעֵדוּתוֹ:

11 For Your name's sake, O Lord, You shall forgive my iniquity, for it is great.

יִלְמַעַן־שִׁמְךָ יְהוָה וְסָלַחְתָּ לְעֲוֹנֵי כִי
רַב־הוּא:

12 Who is this man who fears the Lord? He will guide him on the road that he chooses.

יְבַמֵּי זֶה הָאִישׁ יִרָא יְהוָה יוֹרְנוֹ
בְּדַרְךָ יִבְחַר:

13 His soul shall abide in prosperity, and his seed shall inherit the earth.

יִגְנֹפְשׁוּ בְטוֹב תְּלִין וְזָרְעוֹ יִירֶשׁ
אֶרֶץ:

14 The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and His covenant is to let them know [it].

יִסְתֹּד יְהוָה לִירְאָיו וּבְרִיתוֹ
לְהוֹדִיעֵם:

15 My eyes are always to God for He will take my feet out of the net.

טוֹעֵינִי תִמְיֵד אֶל־יְהוָה כִּי־הוּא יוֹצִיא
מִרְשֵׁת רַגְלִי:

16 Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am alone and poor.

טֹוֹפְנָה־אֵלַי וְחַנּוּנִי כִי־יְחִיד וְעָנִי אָנִי:

17 The troubles of my heart have increased; deliver me from my straits.

יִצְרֹות לִבִּי הִרְחִיבוּ מִמְצוֹקוֹתַי
הוֹצִיאֵנִי:

18 See my affliction and my toil, and forgive all my sins.

יַחַרְאֵה־עֵינַי וְעַמְלִי וְשָׂא לְכָל־
חַטֹּאתַי:

19 See my enemies for they have increased, and they hate me with unjust hatred.

יַחַרְאֵה אֵיבֵי כִי־רָבוּ וְשִׂנְאֵת חַמָּס
שִׂנְאוּנִי:

20 Guard my soul and save me; let me not be shamed for I have taken refuge in You.

כַּשְׁמֶרְהָ גֹפְשִׁי וְהַצִּילְנִי אֶל־אֲבוֹשׁ
כִּי־חָסִיתִי בְךָ:

21 Sincerity and uprightness shall guard me, for I have hoped for You.

כַּתְּמֵם-וַיִּשְׁר יִצְרוּנִי לִי קִוִּיתִיךָ:

22 O God, redeem Israel from all its troubles.

בַּפְּדֹה-אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכָּל צָרוֹתָיו:

This morning I read to you from the Jewish Scriptures, called the Tanakh. The reason I did that is that Psalm 25 in the original Hebrew language was written as an acrostic. That is, each verse was specifically written to begin with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. It would be comparable to our writing a prayer where each line began with the letter of the alphabet: first line with the letter A, second line with the letter B, third line with the letter C, and so on until you had used all the letters of the alphabet from A to Z. It is quite an achievement and quite a testimony to David's creativity and devotion.

Psalm 25 is a prayer for guidance. Now, David was specifically praying for guidance for himself and for his nation, Israel. It is likely that David had written this poetic prayer while he was being chased around by Saul's armies. Saul was the king of Israel and was intent on killing David. So, you can readily understand why David would be praying for divine guidance. But David wanted to pray more than just for himself. He prayed for his beloved nation, Israel, which was beset on all borders with enemies that wanted to destroy them. Not only was David fighting for his very life within the borders of his nation; he was praying by defending his nation's borders from other enemy nations. It was a very precarious position David found himself in.

The prayer itself is a beautiful prayer. It's worth reading over again verse by verse.

¹ In you, LORD my God,
I put my trust.

² I trust in you;
do not let me be put to shame,
nor let my enemies triumph over me.

Can you imagine what a different world we lived in if we actually lived out the phrase we print on our currency: "in God we trust"? I'm waiting for the day when everyone who is offended by that language just wanted to dispose of all they had with that printed on it. I would be glad to step in and help them with that problem.

Seriously though, David was probably on the run for his life when he penned these words. He was in a dire predicament where the only one he could trust not to betray him was God. He prayed that God would not disappoint his trust in him and that his enemies would not triumph over him.

³ No one who hopes in you
will ever be put to shame,
but shame will come on those
who are treacherous without cause.

David was convinced that with his hope firmly placed in the Lord, he would not be put to shame. Nor would anyone else who places their trust in the Lord. The shame instead will fall on the Lord's enemies, those who are treacherous without cause.

⁴ Show me your ways, LORD,
teach me your paths.
⁵ Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long.

If we ask the Lord for guidance, he will teach us. Will we make mistakes? Certainly. For we are still fallible human beings. But the more we rely on God, the fewer mistakes we will make, because God himself intervenes on our behalf. And he doesn't take a break from us. We can hope in him all day long.

⁶ Remember, LORD, your great mercy and love,
for they are from of old.
⁷ Do not remember the sins of my youth
and my rebellious ways;
according to your love remember me,
for you, LORD, are good.

The sins of our past could readily weigh us down. We are many times our own worst enemies because we cannot forgive ourselves. When the Lord forgives us, he casts our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. David prays for God to remember: not to remember the sins of his rebellious days as a youth, but to remember his great mercy and love. God is able to remember us, according to his love, because of God's goodness not because of our goodness.

⁸ Good and upright is the LORD;
therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.
⁹ He guides the humble in what is right
and teaches them his way.

We should not think highly of ourselves, but humble ourselves in the sight of God. It is the one who is humble to whom God will teach his ways.

¹⁰ All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful
toward those who keep the demands of his covenant.

¹¹ For the sake of your name, LORD,
forgive my iniquity, though it is great.

According to my Bible dictionary "A covenant is a formal commitment made by one party to another party, or by two parties to one another; its seriousness is normally undergirded by an oath and/or rite undertaken before God and/or before other people."¹ People think nothing today of breaking their word, some of whom never intended to keep to the demands of the covenant. Our covenant with God is a very serious matter. For Christians, our new covenant (our new testament) is sealed by the blood of Jesus Christ who came to take away the sins of the world.

¹² Who, then, are those who fear the LORD?
He will instruct them in the ways they should choose.

¹³ They will spend their days in prosperity,
and their descendants will inherit the land.

¹⁴ The LORD confides in those who fear him;
he makes his covenant known to them.

When David speaks of fear of the Lord, he doesn't mean being scared of God. It's a word that means having a high respect and deep awe of who God is and what God is capable of doing. A covenant is a two-way street. We trust in God and God confides in us. What a blessed covenant in which we are greatly blessed with the richness of God's presence.

¹⁵ My eyes are ever on the LORD,
for only he will release my feet from the snare.

¹⁶ Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.

¹⁷ Relieve the troubles of my heart
and free me from my anguish.

¹⁸ Look on my affliction and my distress
and take away all my sins.

¹ The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 1:767.

This is certainly a part of David's prayer to which we can relate. Those who are suffering, lonely, afflicted, troubled of heart, anguished, distressed – God is our comfort and strength. He not only comforts us; he takes away our sin so that we are cleansed and made whole and made holy.

- ¹⁹ See how numerous are my enemies
and how fiercely they hate me!
- ²⁰ Guard my life and rescue me;
do not let me be put to shame,
for I take refuge in you.
- ²¹ May integrity and uprightness protect me,
because my hope, LORD, is in you.
- ²² Deliver Israel, O God,
from all their troubles!

And we could say, "Deliver America, O God, from all its troubles!" For our country, without a doubt, is in deep distress. And the distress our country is in all comes back to one thing: that our country is getting farther and farther away from God. A couple of weeks ago I heard a pastor who was a speaker at one of the seminars I attended in Tennessee say something that I, and many other pastors, could relate to. He said one of the most alarming things about the pandemic is that he had come to realize just how shallow the faith was of many of the people who used to come to church. So many people are fighting over a piece of cloth and that's what's keeping them from having a deep relationship with God. Or there are people who got out of the habit of being the church and instead find something else to fill their time on Sunday morning. Some former church-goers are claiming they do not feel safe coming to church, but they do feel safe going to restaurants, sporting events, or fairgrounds. It's more about people falling out of a holy habit and forming bad habits instead of spending the time with the holy God who will guide them, comfort them, and give them needed strength and stamina for the days ahead. Yes, indeed, we need to pray, "Deliver us, O God, from all our troubles!"

And our God is able to deliver us. Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior, who broke his body and shed his blood for us, so that we might be saved from our sins and to be delivered from the troubles of this world. We celebrate that deliverance today, as we come to the Lord, along with followers of Jesus the world over, on this World Communion Sunday.