



## Psalm 25 - Prayer for Guidance and for Deliverance

Of David.

### Introduction

This is a lament in which individual members of the worshipping assembly ask God for help in their various troubles. While it expresses faith in God's kindness toward the faithful, it does not end in the confident way of most laments. The psalm also includes penitential elements, where the worshippers confess their sins and pray for forgiveness (vv.6-7, v.11 and v.18). As the comments will show, there are echoes of Pentateuch promises here, showing that the godly in Israel were to view the Sinai covenant as a gracious one.

This psalm is acrostic, each verse beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This is the first psalm that is a consistent acrostic. Like other acrostics attributed to David (Psalms 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112 and 145), this does not perfectly follow the acrostic pattern: the verse beginning with w, which should be between vv.5-6, is missing; v.18 begins with the letter r, as does v.19, while q is expected; and v.22 begins with p, as does v.16. The acrostic pattern makes it harder for the poem to have a clear flow of thought, but the comments will show that the poet nevertheless provided one.

### Psalm 25:1-3 - Expression of Trust

The psalm opens by expressing confidence in the Lord; the request of v.2 is reaffirmed as assurance in v.3.

<sup>1</sup> To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

## Psalm 25:1

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. This is an expressive figure of speech speaking of the surrender, submission, and waiting upon David directed toward Yahweh, i.e. the Lord, the covenant God of Israel. It was as if David held his soul in outstretched hands up to heaven saying, ‘Here I am Lord, completely surrendered unto you.’

I lift up my soul. This Hebrew expression appears in Deuteronomy 24:15, Proverbs 19:18, Jeremiah 22:27 and 44:14, and Hosea 4:8, where it is translated with terms such as ‘long,’ ‘desire,’ ‘set the heart on,’ ‘be greedy,’ or ‘count on’; thus it is an idiom for ‘I direct my desire’; refer also to Psalms 24:4 86:4 and 143:8.

- <sup>2</sup> O my God, in you I trust;  
do not let me be put to shame;  
do not let my enemies exult over me.
- <sup>3</sup> Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;  
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

## Psalm 25:2-3

O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame. As David declared his trust in God he seemed to speak more to himself than to God. He assured himself of not only his trust in the Lord, but also the expected reward of that trust, to not be ashamed before either the Lord or his enemies.

Do not let my enemies exult over me. This gives some context to this Psalm. Like many others, it was written from a time of trouble. David faced enemies who wanted the worst for him.

To be put to shame, also v.20, is to be publicly shown to have relied on a false basis for hope. The worshippers, who side with the genuinely faithful (I trust, wait for you), expect that their hope in the Lord has a worthy basis, while those who seek to harm them (enemies, wantonly treacherous, i.e. the unfaithful) have founded their hopes on lies: <<*From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One. But I say, I pine away, I pine away. Woe is me! For the treacherous deal treacherously, the treacherous deal very treacherously*>> (Isaiah 24:16), <<*Your eyes are too pure to behold evil, and you cannot look on wrongdoing; why do you look on the treacherous, and are silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they?*>> (Habakkuk 1:13), <<*Its prophets are reckless, faithless persons; its priests have profaned what is sacred, they have done violence to the law*>> (Zephaniah 3:4), and: <<*For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters,*

*arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God*>> (2 Timothy 3:2-4).

The idea of 'waits on you' is not of passively doing nothing; rather, it is of an active service. The idea is not of a waiting room, but of a waiter attending to every desire and need of the one being served. David included himself among those who wait upon the Lord, but also knew that others did, and wanted all of them to be vindicated publically and unashamed. The Biblical idea of ashamed is not primarily embarrassment, although sometimes it is used that way. The primary idea is that of being let down or disappointed, or of having trusted in something that in the end proves unworthy of trust. This is especially reflected in passages such as: <<*Kings shall be your foster-fathers, and their queens your nursing-mothers. With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord; those who wait for me shall not be put to shame*>> (Isaiah 49:23).

#### Psalm 25:4-5 - Desire for Guidance

Those who trust in the Lord seek his guidance, i.e. they want to learn what manner of life pleases him and how his commands apply to their specific circumstances. God's guidance in the Bible is almost always concerned with the moral virtues he wants in his faithful people; in light of these virtues they make their choices in the various circumstances of life.

<sup>4</sup> Make me to know your ways, O Lord;  
teach me your paths.

#### Psalm 25:4

Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. This shows that, although David longed for public vindication, he was not haughty and proud: <<*For has anyone said to God, "I have endured punishment; I will not offend any more; teach me what I do not see; if I have done iniquity, I will do it no more"*?>> (Job 34:31-32). If he needed guidance or correction, he wanted God to do it, and to do it before any public humiliation, in order to prevent public humiliation.

<sup>5</sup> Lead me in your truth, and teach me,  
for you are the God of my salvation;  
for you I wait all day long.

### Psalm 25:5

Lead me in your truth, and teach me. It is certain that no man or woman who has been shown the way by God, or has been taught of his paths, or has been led in his truth has ever been led into sin or compromise that led to public disgrace and dishonour. It is the Holy Spirit's role to lead those who believe in Christ: <<*When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come*>> (John 16:13).

For you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. Because David had received salvation from God, it made him want to wait upon the Lord all the more. It was an appropriate demonstration of commitment and gratitude to the God who had done so much for him. The salvation David received here should be regarded as being rescued in a broad sense. Spiritually speaking he was rescued from despair and sin, both for now and in the life to come. Yet God also rescued his life and health again and again in the present age.

### Psalm 25:6-7 - Desire for Forgiveness

For God's covenant people to make progress in virtue, they must rely on God's grace and kindness, and not on their own virtue, which comes from God's guidance anyway. The terms mercy, steadfast love, sins, and transgressions evoke Exodus 34:6-7, which tells Israel of God's gracious disposition to them. For God to remember something is for him to attend to it in order to act; refer also to 8:4, 9:12 and 20:3. The faithful ask God to attend to them in mercy rather than according to their sins, as confirmed by 79:8.

<sup>6</sup> Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love,  
for they have been from of old.

### Psalm 25:6

Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord. David asked God to remember his grace and goodness, using the plural of the wonderful word steadfast love or loving kindness, which speaks of God's deep, covenant love: <<*But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house, I will bow down towards your holy temple in awe of you*>> (Psalm 5:7). David thought of this love in the plural, loving kindnesses, as if God's covenant love was so great that it could not be thought of in the singular.

For they have been from of old. David pressed his request to God on the basis of his prior work. 'Lord, you have shown me great mercy and covenant love in the past; remember it now and do it again at my point of present need.'

- 7 Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;  
according to your steadfast love remember me,  
for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

#### Psalm 25:7

Do not remember the sins of my youth. Immediately after asking God to remember (v.6), David then asked God to forget. He wanted God to forget his own youthful sins in the sense of forgiving them, and he wanted God to remember God's own faithfulness in prior times. Job, in his anguish, believed the exact opposite to David: <<***For you write bitter things against me, and make me reap the iniquities of my youth***>> (Job 13:26). Paul recognised that such sin was something to overcome: <<***Shun youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart***>> (2 Timothy 2:22).

According to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord! These are strong expressions of David's humility and even repentance. He asked to be remembered not on the basis of merit, but on the basis of mercy. He wanted God to do all this remembering and forgetting for the sake of God's own goodness, not David's supposed goodness.

#### Psalm 25:8-11 - Praise for the Lord's Goodness and Mercy

This section picks up the ideas of God's goodness, steadfast love, and faithfulness from vv.6-7, and his guidance from vv.4-5. It celebrates the character of God, by which he forgives his people and guides them in moral growth. The OT expects that the people will keep God's covenant, i.e. lay hold of the forgiveness and guidance that it graciously offers.

- 8 Good and upright is the Lord;  
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
- 9 He leads the humble in what is right,  
and teaches the humble his way.

#### Psalm 25:8-9

Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. David's observation here was not learned through simple logic. It is just as logical for God to judge or destroy sinners as it is for him to teach them: <<***I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you***>> (Psalm 32:8), and: <<***For they are well instructed; their God teaches them***>> (Isaiah 28:26). Yet David had learned this through love more than logic:

that God is good and upright, and this goodness can be for the benefit of sinners instead of their destruction.

He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. David knew there was a particular kind of sinner that received this instruction and guidance from the good God, the humble man or woman. Not every sinner receives these good things from God, but those who will humble themselves before him do: <<***Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth***>> (Matthew 5:5).

<sup>10</sup> All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,  
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

<sup>11</sup> For your name's sake, O Lord,  
pardon my guilt, for it is great.

### Psalm 25:10-11

All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees. This is a remarkable promise. The conditions are that one stays in God's covenant and in his word, that is, his testimony, both in the sense of knowing them and obeying them. The promise is that God will continually reveal his mercy and truth in all that they live and experience: <<***With the loyal you show yourself loyal; with the blameless you show yourself blameless***>> (Psalm 18:25). A discouraged believer might say, 'God's path for me is severe and terrible, at least at the present moment.' David answers from both his knowledge and experience, 'All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, for those who stay in his covenant and in his word. Focus yourself once again on his covenant and his testimonies and you will see this for yourself.'

The paths of the Lord. In the Hebrew the word here used is 'wheel tracks,' with ruts such as wagons make when they go down farm tracks in wet weather and sink in up to the axles. God's ways are at times like heavy wagon tracks, and they cut deep into one's soul; yet all of them are paths of mercy.

For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great. Once again, a strong expression of David's humility can be seen. He expected pardon for God's sake, not his own. He humbly recognised the greatness of his own iniquity. It should be recognised that all sin is great:

- When account is taken of whom it is committed against.
- When it is considered that it is against a just and fair law.
- Because it is committed by those made in the image of God.
- When the amount of sin considered.

David seemed to know the freedom and peace that comes from saying, ‘Lord, I know that I am a great sinner; but you are an even greater Saviour. I humbly submit myself to you and ask you to pardon my guilt.’

### Psalm 25:12-15 - Confidence in the Lord’s Friendship

The faithful have a close and intimate relationship with God. Verse 12 focuses on the particular person (the man, taken as an example for all the pious regardless of sex or age) who fears the Lord; such a person will know God’s guidance, blessing, and friendship, i.e. he welcome into his intimate company; refer also to Psalm 55:14 and Proverbs 3:32. The well-being of v.13 is the expression of God’s goodness reflected in vv.7-8.

<sup>12</sup> Who are they that fear the Lord?

He will teach them the way that they should choose.

### Psalm 25:12

Who are they that fear the Lord? He will teach them the way that they should choose. Using the Hebrew poetic tool of repetition, David set the idea of humility (v.9) next to the idea of a reverent fear of God. The two concepts are closely connected, and this humble, reverent person can expect the gift of God’s guidance and instruction. Job was considered to be such a man in his generation: <<*The Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil’*>> (Job 1:8).

<sup>13</sup> They will abide in prosperity,  
and their children shall possess the land.

<sup>14</sup> The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him,  
and he makes his covenant known to them.

### Psalm 25:13-14

They will abide in prosperity. David described the earthly, material blessings that often come to the humble and reverent. It may be sensed that perhaps David said this in faith; that although his present situation was bad, he trusted that prosperity and blessing for his descendants would come in time. It was, after all, one of the promises of God to the faithful: <<*See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity*>> (Deuteronomy 30:15), and: <<*If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life*>> (1 Kings 3:14).

The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him. After touching on the material blessings that may come to the humble and reverent man, David then spoke of the greatest blessing that one may receive, the friendship of the Lord, and a greater understanding of his covenant: *<<Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own>>* (John 7:17).

Some translations have secret for friendship, which is a reminder that there are realities of Christian knowledge and experience known only with Paul's understanding: *<<Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are discerned spiritually>>* (1 Corinthians 2:14). To explain such secrets to those who do not have the Spirit of God is like explaining colours to a blind person or musical harmonies to a deaf person.

<sup>15</sup> My eyes are ever towards the Lord,  
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

#### Psalm 25:15

My eyes are ever towards the Lord. David said this both as a statement of fact, but also as a prayer for the future. He knew the importance of keeping the attention of his mind and soul toward the Lord, especially in times of trouble: *<<O our God, will you not execute judgement upon them? For we are powerless against this great multitude that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you>>* (2 Chronicles 20:12). Today, believers should keep their spiritual eyes firmly fixed on Jesus: *<<Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God>>* (Hebrews 12:1-2).

For he will pluck my feet out of the net. This is a reminder that this psalm was written from a season of trouble, in which David still felt himself caught. His feet were still in the net his enemies had set against him.

#### Psalm 25:16-21 - Request for Forgiveness and Protection

The psalm gathers all these confident thoughts and turns them into prayer for the particular circumstances of trouble, asking for deliverance from the affliction, trouble, and foes that threaten (vv.17-19), on the basis of forgiven sins (v.18b). The virtues of integrity and uprightness (v.21), which are recognised as gifts, are God's means of protection; something confirmed by: *<<prudence will watch over*

*you; and understanding will guard you. It will save you from the way of evil, from those who speak perversely>> (Proverbs 2:11-12).*

- 16 Turn to me and be gracious to me,  
for I am lonely and afflicted.
- 17 Relieve the troubles of my heart,  
and bring me out of my distress.
- 18 Consider my affliction and my trouble,  
and forgive all my sins.
- 19 Consider how many are my foes,  
and with what violent hatred they hate me.
- 20 O guard my life, and deliver me;  
do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.
- 21 May integrity and uprightness preserve me,  
for I wait for you.

#### Psalm 25:16-21

Turn to me and be gracious to me. David did not hesitate to repeat his request to God, and he did so with a clever turn of thought. In v.15 he spoke of how he had turned his attention towards the Lord; here he asked God to turn his attention towards his needy servant.

Lonely and afflicted, troubles, distress, affliction, and clearly inner pain. This sweet, comforting psalm came from a season of agony for David. Much of the agony came from his enemies, for there were many set against him. Some one thousand years before Paul, he lived what the apostle would later write: *<<We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies>> (2 Corinthians 4:8-10).*

I take refuge in you, I wait for you. The present difficult David endured would not prevent him from trusting and serving God. This was a deep relationship with God, not one easily damaged or separated by disappointment.

#### Psalm 25:22 - Prayer for the Whole People

David cries out for redemption. Redeem generally conveys the idea of rescue and protection, especially when its object is Israel or a faithful worshipper. In some

places, although not here, it carries the idea of exchanging a substitute or ransom: <<*But every firstborn donkey you shall redeem with a sheep; if you do not redeem it, you must break its neck. Every firstborn male among your children you shall redeem*>> (Exodus 13:13), and: <<*No human beings who have been devoted to destruction can be ransomed; they shall be put to death*>> (Leviticus 27:29).

<sup>22</sup> Redeem Israel, O God,  
out of all its troubles.

### Psalm 25:22

Redeem Israel, O God. It is not known if this psalm came from the time before David was king, or after. Whether it was before or after, David had a deep concern for the blessing and welfare of God's people as a whole, not merely for himself. David knew God was Israel's saviour: <<*It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities*>> (Psalm 130:8). In later years it was hoped that Jesus would do so: <<*He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place*>> (Luke 24:19-21). They were right to hope in that way but had simply misunderstood what had happened at the time!

Out of all its troubles. It is remarkable that David could care for and offer a prayer for the troubles of others, when he was in a season of such difficulty. This shows a life that was indeed instructed in God's ways, even as David prayed. One of the worst aspects of difficulty and trial in the life of the believer is that it can lead one to become terribly self-focused and concerned only with their own problems. David, in his humility and reverence to God, was guided in a better way.