

## You and God in Difficult Times

**Psalm 25:1-10**  
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**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Pastor Dave Carlson**

The legendary World War II war correspondent Ernie Pyle once wrote a column about a captured German soldier taken to an American field hospital to have his wounds treated. The German had heard Nazi propaganda about American brutality. So when a medic approached him with a shot of morphine, he assumed he was about to be tortured. The man kicked up quite a fuss, until he looked around and realized he was being treated the same as the American patients. He was amazed. He grew even more amazed when he saw an American chaplain handing out care packages of cigarettes, chocolate, tooth powder, soap and other items. The chaplain gave him a care package too, making no distinction. The German's attitude changed. He began smiling, then grinning like a little boy playing with new toys. This change came about only after he learned to trust.

“O my God, in you I trust,” says David. “Do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me. Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame....” Here, David is talking about what to do when you're attacked by external or internal forces. For David, he calls the external forces his enemies and the internal forces his shame. There's no indication precisely when the psalm was written, but we do know that David protected the Israelite nation from enemies both foreign and domestic, and we know that David had reason to be personally ashamed – just look up what he did to Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah, if you're not sure about that.

Like us, David faced overwhelming forces beyond his control, and he succumbed to terrible temptations with the gravest of consequences. And here in Psalm 25, he teaches us how to respond to such outside forces and internal temptations while remaining faithful to God and neighbor.

You know what I mean. How do we get through this time of inflation when our already limited and stretched financial resources no longer seem to be enough for our daily needs? How do we get through this dismal financial market, which is really sapping so many people's retirement savings?

How do we get through this era of low church-attendance, this cultural shift away from families valuing and supporting what church has to offer, families more or less sitting on the sidelines and/or being pulled in a hundred different directions?

Not to mention today's political unrest and senseless violence, the nation's addiction crises, people with employment issues, families struggling to make ends meet, and people hit with one medical issue after another – the list just goes on and on. And that's just those outside forces that grip us.

There's also the inner struggles we face – those feelings of guilt for past mistakes, inadequacy for things left undone or not accomplished, anger over past hurts still festering, embracement about our physical appearance, worry about the struggles we face – that list just goes on and on, as well. What are we to do? Well, if we're anything like David – and as fellow children of God we are – then we turn to God, joining David in saying, "To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul."

The first thing to do in the face of any and all of this is to lift our souls up to God, to go to God with what burdens us. David, in taking his burdens to the Lord, provides an example for us to follow in dealing with our struggles. Notice that David does not simply turn to God in prayer, but rather, he also turns to God in action. David puts his money where his mouth is, so to speak.

David becomes a student of God, always seeking to learn something new. He says, "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; for you I wait all day long."

When was the last time you actually learned something new about God, particularly when it comes to the greatest struggles we face? Too often, we approach Bible study and our reflections on faith academically rather than practically. Seldom do we actually take a difficult situation and turn to scripture for the answer, or ask a fellow Christian, "Where do you see God in all of this?" And yet, that's just what David does, and it's just what can be of help to us, as well.

Take a moment right now and think of that thing that's really bothering you. Now imagine taking it to the Lord. And not in prayer only, but also in study and action, in a quest for new information, a new perspective, opening yourself up to actually learning something new rather than just being resolved that things can't get better, that there is no answer.

It's like the man worrying about his health while sitting with his wife in the living room. "Just so you know," he said, "I never want to live in a vegetative state, dependent on some machine and fluids from a bottle. If that ever happens, just pull the plug." With that, his wife gets up and unplugs the TV and throw out all of his beer. "... A vegetative state, dependent on (a) machine and fluids from a bottle.

Yes, don't let yourself be fooled into thinking that things can't get better, that there is no answer. There is always an answer if we're willing to search for it.

As Jesus said (Matt. 7:7-8), "Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened."

Of course, one of the reasons we fail to ask, search and knock when it comes to guidance and instruction from the Lord is that it might just take something of us to attain it and to put it into action. And we're busy, we're tired, we're overwhelmed, we don't have the time, energy or patience to set aside everything else and take our trouble to the Lord through study, prayer and wise counsel.

And that's a problem. And yet it really does seem like that's how it's always been and that's how it will always be – too many problems and not enough time, not enough time to do the work of searching our hearts, laying our burdens before the Lord, seeking information and advice on how to do things differently, and then having the faith and energy and hope to try something new, a new approach to an old problem.

When David faced the hard work of trying a new way of dealing with his problems, a more faithful way, he first turned to the Lord and then he repented for not coming to the Lord sooner. He says, "Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord.... Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions. According to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord!"

Here, David is seeking a do-over with the Lord. He's asking God to accept and guide him as a new creation in Christ, in Spirit. And so it is with us. Whatever it is you've done or left undone in your relationship with the Lord, your approach to life as a child of God, your wavering hope and mounting fears, God offers you a do-over. God is ready to accept you just as you are and guide you forward as if this were your first day as a follower of Christ.

If this were your first day as a follower of the Lord, what would you do? How would you feel? How would things change for you? What would you do with the troubles you have, the struggles you face, the burdens you bear? If you were just discovering all the promises and hope of the Lord? It's kind of a freeing thought, isn't it?

Well, I've got news for you. Today is that day! Today is a new day and you are a new creation in Christ, if you so choose. Or you can keep doing things like you've always done, and keep getting what you've always gotten. But that's not what the Lord wants for you –

for me. The Lord wants to bless us in new ways, astonish us with new insights, guide us through new practices, and come to us in new and life-giving relationships.

That is the day the Lord has made for you, today! Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Let us be open to new ways of leaning on the Lord, confident he will give us – give you - the knowledge and faith to face this day and all your tomorrows as the faithful children of God you are, full of new hope and unimaginable promise. Amen.

### **PASTORAL PRAYER**

Healer God, come to us now as you did long ago. Come to us with strength and courage as you did for Elijah and for Micah.

Come to us with guidance and purpose as you did for Mother Mary and the Apostle Peter.

Come and sooth the despair that hangs heavy upon us, and bring a healing balm for our brokenness, mind, body and spirit.

We pray for peace and comfort, healing and strength for those who grieve and those with illness and disease. And for all of us, your beloved children, God, we are too often troubled by demons of worry, stress, anxiety, anger and greed.

The warring of the nations goes on, financial stresses mount, and social unrest grows, and we find our trust placed in so many wrong places. Center our lives upon you, O Lord, and remind us that we live always in your grace and mercy and provision.

We pray this in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray together, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**