

It is always a privilege to open the word with you. And I want to invite you to keep your Bibles open at Psalm 25. I wonder how many of you would say you have a life verse, a particular passage of Scripture that has meant more to you than any other, that you have returned to time and time again for strength and comfort. If you don't have one specific passage that comes to mind, that's ok! I don't either. But I do have a few verses or passages that I've come back to more than most, and Psalm 25 is certainly on that list for me. I have returned to this Psalm again and again for various reasons at various times in my life.

But earlier this year, I was working my way through the Psalms devotionally, and when I got here this familiar prayer landed in my heart with fresh power. I read it with a strong sense that as I begin this new chapter in ministry as your senior pastor, this is exactly how I need to pray. And I believe the same is true for all of us as we engage in the ministry the Lord has entrusted to us. This is how we need to pray.

I hope you know that if you are a Christian, you have been entrusted with Christian ministry. Ministry is not reserved exclusively for people with official titles or positions. In fact, Ephesians 4:11–12 says, *[God] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.*

We all have a part to play in building up the body of Christ. Your ministry might be as an elder, pastor, or deacon. It might be as a LIFE Group leader, a Sunday School Teacher, or a Youth Group Volunteer. In this season, your primary ministry might be as a mom, dad or grandparent seeking to raise kids who love the Lord, or as an evangelist, working to lead your neighbors to Christ. There are so many ways we serve the Lord, and build up his body, but we all have a part. And as we serve, lots of our prayers are focused on the needs of those whom we serve. And it's obviously very important that we pray for others. In fact, Psalm 25 ends with David praying for the redemption of God's people. But until that final verse, David is praying for himself.

And therefore, Psalm 25 is a reminder that while we pray for others, we must never neglect praying for ourselves. Because we need God's help as much as anyone else. So, with our time this morning, I want to invite you to join me in following David's example in Psalm 25. I want to invite you to join me in asking God for protection, mercy, and guidance as we seek to carry out the ministry he has entrusted to us in this new year.

Let's take those one at a time...

### **1. Pray for Protection**

We don't know the particulars of the situation, but as David writes Psalm 25, he is in danger. Look at how his prayer begins in verses 1-2. He says, *To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me.* (vv.1-2)

David has enemies. There are people around him who have some desire to exult over him and put him to shame. In this context, to be put to shame is not simply to be embarrassed, it is to be defeated and disgraced. We don't know what enemies David had in mind, but we can guess.

Was it a foreign army, or collection of armies, rallying together to raid David's kingdom? Did he write this Psalm earlier in his life when Saul and his men sought to destroy David and prevent him from ascending to the throne? Or was it later, when his own son Absalom betrayed him, and tried to take David's place as king? Whatever the particulars, someone is making a concerted effort to put David to shame. He's not paranoid. This is a real threat, and he knows he needs help. So where does he look? To his own resolve? To his own fortitude? To his own strength? No.

*To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust.*

This is prayer at its best. David is lifting up his soul, the entirety of his life and everything that concerns him, to God. And notice how he addresses God. He calls him LORD. Capital L-O-R-D. This is God as he has revealed himself. In Exodus 34... *The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness* (Exodus 34:6).

This is the God who will never break his promises, who's love never ends, and who will always take care of his people. And notice, David does not only call him LORD. David also calls him, "my God!" David knows that he is one of God's people. And therefore, he is not merely lifting up his soul and entrusting his life to the God of his fathers, or the God of his nation, this is personal. "You are my God!" David declares. "In you I trust." And therefore, despite his real concern about his real enemies, David expresses his confidence. Verse 3: *Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.*

Waiting on the Lord is not passive. It is the active decision to put your faith in him and rest your hopes upon him. And no one who waits for the Lord will be put to shame. David knows that whatever his enemies may do, they will not have the last laugh. He knows that God will protect him and deliver him in the end. We could apply this prayer to our own lives in many ways. We face many dangers, toils, and snares. But let's never forget where much of our danger comes from. Let's never forget that we have a powerful enemy who would love to put us to shame, to defeat us and disgrace us. In part, because of what that would mean for us, but also, because of the disruption and discouragement this would bring to the people God has called us to serve here in our church... within our families... out in our community.

Satan knows that if he could take us down, by tarnishing our witness through some moral failure or destroying our faith by drawing us away from Jesus, he would win a great victory. And he is very crafty. He has many schemes and strategies. He is, as Peter says, *like a roaring lion, prowling around seeking those whom he might devour.*

So, how can we resist him? With our own resolve? Through our own fortitude? In own strength? No. We will resist our enemy and avoid the shame by entrusting our souls to the LORD. By reminding ourselves that he is our God. By standing firm in the strength of his might, covered and protected with all his armor. And praying at all times, like David prays in verse 20: *Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me! Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you* (Psalm 25:20).

Brothers and sisters, let's pray for protection. Second, let's...

## **2. Pray for Mercy**

Look at verses 6-7: David prays, *Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!*

As he expresses his concern about some external enemy, David remembers that he faces an internal threat as well: the danger of his own sin. And at many points in his life, David needed to turn to the Lord for mercy, as do we. The most famous, of course, was after his sin with Bathsheba. You can read his confession, his plea for mercy, and his joy in God's grace related to that sin in Psalm 51. But here in Psalm 25, something different is happening. David is not wrestling with the fresh guilt of a recent failure but with the memory of sins in his past, probably years, maybe even decades in his past. Did you hear what he said? *O LORD... remember not the sins of my youth.*

Why would the sins of his youth be coming to mind? I wrestled with that question and found help from a couple of Scottish pastors from previous generations. The first is a minister from the 17<sup>th</sup> century named David Dickson. Reflecting on this verse, Dickson writes, "New afflictions may easily renew the sense of old sins, even from the time of youth, albeit forgiven of God, and forgotten by the believer, and the tempter can make use thereof in the day of trouble."

Do you hear what Dickson is saying? When God's people face new afflictions. When enemies rise against us, when pressures mount around us, among the fear and the angst another trial can sometimes come. Satan may try to kick us while we are down by dragging up sins from our past, sins long forgiven, and even forgotten. And Satan, whom the Bible calls the Accuser, will hold them up in front of our face and say, "Given what you've done, why would you expect God to deliver you from this trial?" Or "Why would you think God could use you in his ministry?"

What do we do when this happens? Well, Dickson says, "[In these cases] the believer without loss may read over blotted accounts, and renew petitions for pardon." I love that. When the enemy drags up the sins of your youth, and accuses you with long-forgotten failures, and tempts you to question the love of God for you, read over blotted accounts. If you imagine him holding a sheet of paper with your sins on it, picture yourself taking it out of his hand and saying to your enemy, "Yes, you're right. It's all there. I don't deny it at all." "But here's what you've failed to mention. Every one of these wrongs has been blotted out, covered by the mercy of my God through the blood of his Son."

*Jesus paid it all.*  
*All to him I owe.*  
*Sin had left a crimson stain.*  
*He washed it white as snow.*

Then, to solidify this fresh application of grace in your own heart, turn from your enemy to your God, and renew your petition for pardon. Pray like David: *Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth or my*

*transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!*

Friends, far from making us unfit for ministry, it is that very dependance upon God's mercy that makes us fit for ministry. And that brings me to another Scottish man, whose name is Alexander Whyte. And thanks to Pastor Colin for sharing this quote with me. In one of his books, Whyte describes a local church in need of a new pastor. And this church has two candidates: One is a young man, just out of seminary. The other is an angel from heaven. And the question is: Who should the church choose to serve as their pastor? Well, here's Whyte's opinion.

He says, "You might have the angel who rolled away the stone and sat on it for your other candidate, but he should have no vote of mine. Give me for my minister, not Gabriel himself, but a fellow-sinner who has been [made alive] together with Christ, and who can describe the process and the experience till my death-cold heart burns within me... Give me a minister whom God hath raised from the dead."

Far from making us unfit for ministry, dependance upon God's mercy makes us fit for ministry. Yes, there are some sins that would disqualify us from ministry. But there are many that don't. And our personal experience of God's transforming grace allows us to look at our fellow-sinners (in our church, in our homes, in our world) and tell them everything the Lord has done for us, and all that he can do for them. So, as we seek to carry out our ministry, let's pray for protection, let's pray for mercy, and let's...

### **3. Pray for Guidance**

As we enter this new year, with the responsibilities and opportunities God has entrusted to us, let's never stop asking him to guide us. Once again, David offers us a model prayer. Look at verses 4-5. He prays, *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 the day long.*

David wants to know God's ways, so that he might walk in God's paths, faithfully following God's instruction. And David believes that God will answer this prayer. Look at verses 8-9. David declares, *Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.*

Notice, there are two necessary requirements if we want to receive God's direction:

1. We need to be sinners.
2. We need to be humble.

To put it another way, we need to know that we cannot depend upon ourselves. Sin distorts our minds and disorders our hearts, and therefore we should exercise an appropriate caution about the places our personal wisdom and desires might take us. "Trust yourself" and "Follow your heart" is only good advice if your heart and mind are perfect. By God's grace our hearts and minds are being changed, but they are not flawless yet. So, we need to remember the effect sin has on us, and allow that reality to humble us to the point where we will seek the Lord's guidance. Now, when you get to that point, how does the Lord lead and direct?

Let me give you three answers. They aren't the only answers, but they are key answers.

**First, God leads us with his Word.**

In Psalm 25:4 David prays, *Teach me your paths*. How does God do that? In Psalm 119:105 David declares, *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*.

You are not going to open your Bible and find a list of SMART goals to pursue for 2026, or step-by-step instructions to resolve that issue in your LIFE Group, or the manuscript for your next message in Sunday School. But you will find that his word lights your path with wisdom and truth. This is why it is essential to immerse our life in Scripture if we want to serve well. If we don't know God's Word, we won't know God's will. God leads us with his word. And...

**God leads us with his providence.**

As Proverbs 16:9 reminds us, *The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps*. That word "establishes" can also be translated "directs." It's good to make plans for ministry, informed by the word, but ultimately, God will direct us. And we often experience God's providence like the opening and closing of doors. Think of your life as a hallway of options. As you walk down the hallway, ask yourself: Where do I see God opening doors? And where do I see God closing doors? If you have a decision to make and multiple doors are open to you, all of which you can walk through and be faithful to what you see in his word, then you have the freedom to decide! But if all but one door seems to close, remember that you have a sovereign God, and trust that this is his good providence guiding you.

God leads us with his word. God leads us with his providence. And last thing today,

**God leads us with his presence.**

In Psalm 25, David is like a sheep, looking to the good shepherd for guidance and direction. This is why he says, "I wait for *you* all the day long." Not simply, "I wait for your counsel... I wait for your direction..." No, "I wait for you." In other words, "Lord, I'm not going anywhere without you."

It reminds me of the scene in Exodus 33, which comes right on the heels of the story of the golden calf. And the Lord tells Moses, "Depart; go up from here, you and the people... to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob... I will send an angel before you... Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey." It all sounds great, until God says, "But I will not go up among you." And Exodus 33:4 says, "When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned." Then we read how Moses prayed to the Lord, saying, "Please show me now your ways... [but] if your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here." In other words, "Lord, we're not going anywhere without you."

That's the disposition we want to have as we carry out the ministry the Lord has entrusted to us. We don't want to go anywhere without him. And so, we pray, *Make [us] to know your ways, O LORD; teach [us] your paths. Lead [us] in your truth and teach [us], for you are the God of [our] salvation; for you [we] wait all the day long.*

And as we pray this, God will answer us. And he will lead us. And we will be blessed. For, *All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies* (v.10).

### **Conclusion**

In Psalm 25 David prays for protection, for mercy, and for guidance. Let's make these the constant topics of our prayers as well, not only for the people we serve, but for ourselves. 2026 will be another year full of opportunity to serve the Lord, to engage in the work of ministry in a wide variety of capacities, for building up the body of Christ. I hope you will consider how God is calling you to use your time and your talents this year. But I also hope you will see that none of us are sufficient for these things, at least not on our own.

Yet, if the Lord is protecting us, and pouring out his mercy upon us, and guiding us by the light of his word and the kindness of his providence, there's no telling what he might do in and through us. So, let's ask him.