

The Song of a Struggling Sinner

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[0 : 0 0] Sean and the Woos are dear friends of ours. I got the privilege of meeting Sean at our pastor's college back in 2013-14 and I would say that it is very true that his iron sharpens iron so spending time with Sean Woo was some of the most edifying and blessed time of being there for a year and he's the only regret of not being able to spend more time with him of the way in which Sean encourages challenges and spurs us on in our faith and you are blessed to have him as your pastor and we love to get to know the Woos as well and they have a few more since we last met them and what a blessing they are. As Sean said this morning this evening we're going to be in Psalm 25 but before we get there let me pray and give some more opening words of introduction.

Would you pray with me? Father God we are very much aware of our need for you this evening of your need to speak to help to help us concentrate. Thank you for the facilities we meet in but even then we need help to focus things are still not the way we expect them to be and anything it seems can distract us from what is truly valuable what is truly going to help us and speak to us. Help me as I preach help us all as we listen to be submitted to your word and by your spirit working in and in us and through us will change us more into the likeness of your son Jesus Christ. In his name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Like I say we're going to turn to Psalm 25 but before I read there let me ask you are you familiar with what with one of the shortest and yet perhaps the most terrifying questions that known to man and it's the question are we there yet? It's a question which most parents have received during some long car journey or other and you may well have even asked it yourself at one point or another.

It's a short yet terrifying question because we know that it is not an honest inquiry about geographic location about distance and travel times but it is a question loaded with hidden meaning.

Maybe it really means I'm hungry or I'm thirsty or I'm tired or I'm bored or my brother hit me or I need the bathroom or I feel sick or any other thing and you as the parent receiving this request are now expected to deal with it to be the answer and address this need. You heard the struggle now respond.

[2 : 5 9] Now as adults we don't tend to ask that question anymore at least not in that way we don't articulate it but I think we still carry within us the same spirit about many of the things we experience through the journey of life. Many of us and we're all experiencing obviously the impacts of COVID-19, the health impacts and then responding and dealing with various precautions and response to the virus and it's right and appropriate in our souls to ask are we there yet? But there may be many other things that we experience struggles with where we ask that same essential question. Maybe it's some difficult relationship within our families or within our work colleagues. Maybe it's just the struggle with holding down a decent paying job even though you've tried your hardest to apply yourself.

Maybe it's an ongoing struggle with sin and guilt that doesn't seem to move and it's just a question of Lord are we there yet? I want to be done with this. And although we may not articulate those words I think we're somewhere often in a spectrum of how we handle complaints and struggles. On one end it may be that complaining becomes very easy to you and you will complain in every breath every opportunity anyone who will listen. And with the advance of social media obviously we've all got a platform 24-7 in which to share our complaints and find someone at least who's going to jump on that complaint and join with us in it. But on the other end of the spectrum maybe you don't know how to complain or maybe you've been brought up like I have in a culture where we really don't complain at all.

I am British and part of our ethos is to keep a stiff upper lip. Complaining just won't do. We don't do that. And generally speaking obviously everyone's different. Cultures are different and vary widely.

But I would say New England we tend to endorse that attitude don't we? No I'm not going to complain. I won't say anything. I don't want to rock the boat. Well wherever you are on that spectrum we will be wrong in how we address and handle complaints if we don't do so in the way God intends to us. Intends us to handle our struggles and our complaints before him.

And this evening we're going to look in the Psalms to help us, guide us and teach us in how to handle complaints in a way which is honoring to God and his word rather than be informed by our natural bent or by our culture around us.

[5 : 47] Actually if you're not familiar the Psalms have a rich content of various different Psalms of different types and dynamics but actually the most common of all the Psalms are Psalms of lament or Psalms of complaint.

So clearly we can take from that that God wants us to know how we can and how we should bring our struggles to him and how to do so.

So we're going to look at Psalm 20-25 as a good lesson for us in how to bring our struggles to God and by God's grace I trust that we're going to learn the way God intends for us to pour out our soul and our struggles to him because of his steadfast love and his mercy and goodness to us in Christ Jesus.

So read with me in Psalm 25 starting in verse 1. The Psalmist David says this, 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. Indeed none who wait for you shall be put to shame.

[6 : 59] They shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. 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 will wait all the day long. 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. 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. All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

For your namesake O Lord pardon my guilt for it is great. Who is the man who fears the Lord? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.

[8 : 03] His soul shall abide in well-being and his offspring shall inherit the land. The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him and he makes known to them his covenant.

My eyes are ever toward the Lord for he will pluck my feet out from the net. Turn to me and be gracious to me for I am lonely and afflicted.

The troubles of my heart are enlarged. Bring me out of my distresses. Consider my affliction and my trouble and forgive all my sins.

Consider how many are my foes and with what violent hatred they hate me. O God my soul and deliver me. Let me not be put to shame for I take refuge in you.

May integrity and uprightness preserve me for I wait for you. Redeem Israel O God out of all his troubles. This is God's word from Psalm 25.

[9 : 05] I encourage you to keep that open in front of you if you can because we'll be referencing various verses through that through this message. I'm sure you've seen as we were reading that that this psalm doesn't cover one single struggle that David has but it's rather many entwined threads throughout this psalm entwined threads of David's the psalmist is struggling with of what he's expecting from God and how he is approaching God because of them.

And I think life is like that for all of us isn't it? Rarely are we presented with one issue all by itself one struggle at a time. Often we have many and they are all connected in one form or another.

If not directly in what's causing them then at least in how they impact us in terms of maybe our body or our mind or our souls at least before the Lord. So to help us see these elements in the psalm we're going to consider it under three questions and with each question we're going to try to tease out those entwined threads so that we can better appreciate and benefit from it once we put them all back together.

So the three questions we're going to look at from this psalm is what shall we bring to God? What should we bring to God? What should we expect from God? And then how should we wait for God?

What should we bring to God? What should we expect from God? And how should we wait for God? And for each of those we're going to kind of tease out four threads of thought that we see through the psalms through that psalm.

[10 : 43] So first of all let's start with what should we bring to God? And the first thread we tease out in that answering that question is the need that we bring to God of being lost and in need of direction.

Look at verse four. 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. We're perhaps very keenly aware of our need under these current unprecedented circumstances with COVID and the regularly changing guidance and directives that we're asking this question aren't we of one another and of God what should we do?

What does wisdom look like regarding my personal health? Regarding the health of my loved ones? What's the right thing to do about my work situation? Whether I'm still employed and I'm having to adjust to new working arrangements or maybe I'm now out of work and I'm looking for new work perhaps in a completely different field than before.

What about coming to church? Do I come to church? Do I stay home? What should our service look like? I'm sure your elders are wrestling with those sorts of questions. What about school?

What does school look like when we go back to school and how will that affect our decision as to what we do next year? We have all of these things in common to some degree of feeling lost and in need of direction under these present circumstances but we don't need to pretend that these struggles only started with COVID.

[12 : 19] All of these sorts of questions and many more are regular questions we face. Questions around our career, our family, health, relationships, finances.

Psalm 25 tells us that we can channel all of these struggles about feeling lost and in need of direction to God. The second theme or thread we see here in terms of bringing our needs to God, our struggles to God is in terms of attack from our enemies.

Verse 2 says, Oh my God, in you I trust. Let me not be put to shame. Let not my enemies exult over me. And then later in verse 19, Consider how many are my foes and with what violent hatred do they hate me.

Now you may not think of many people around you as enemies as such, but I think we all know what it means to have people oppose us at one time or another in different ways.

It may be something as simple as the person who cut you off in market basket parking lot to something far more long lasting as the work colleague who is persistently seeking to undermine you for the last 10 years.

[13 : 30] Or perhaps it's opposition that you experience for speaking out for Christian truth and values in the matters of race or ethnicity. Or challenging either side of the political spectrum when either policy or character conflicts with God and his ways.

The psalmist does not hesitate to bring this opposition to God and encourages us to do the same. The third thing we see here in what the psalmist brings to God is the need around loneliness.

In verse 16, Turn to me and be gracious to me for I am lonely and afflicted. So often with opposition either directed to me personally or impersonally by virtue just of the group that I identify with or groups I identify with that coupled with opposition comes a deep sense of being alone.

Even though others may be around me physically, if they stand against me or against my beliefs, we feel that distance between us in our souls, don't we? We feel very much that sense of us and them which leads to our isolation.

Or again, in this climate of COVID, many are physically alone and isolated in a way which is unprecedented. And it doesn't take long under those circumstances for loneliness to be a constant and unwelcome companion from the moment you wake up to the moment you go to bed at night.

[15 : 06] And Psalm 25 invites us to pour out that loneliness to God. The fourth struggle that we see here in this psalm is with sin and with guilt.

Verse 7 says, Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions. And in verse 11, For your namesake, O Lord, pardon my guilt for it is great.

The psalmist does not either hide past or present sin or guilt over that sin from God but regardless for all of us whether you came to Christ as an adult as I did or whether you grew up in a Christian home and have always walked with him as long as you can remember, most of us I would imagine can look back at our youth our younger days and have regret for things that we did or things that we said or things that we neglected to do that did not meet God's standard of character or his ways.

And yet sadly our fight with sin isn't confined simply to our youth or to our younger days although by God's grace we should see progress year by year yet the nearer we walk with Jesus the more is exposed within us that does not meet God's standard which the Bible calls sin.

And sometimes that sense of sin perhaps either because of the sense of its magnitude or because of a sense of how persistently it remains and lingers plaguing us and without any appreciable progress that sin and guilt can weigh heavily on our souls.

[16 : 45] and yet God's word in Psalm 25 encourages us to see that there is no end to being able to bring our burden of sin and guilt before God.

Whether it is fresh from this morning or where it is from decades ago Psalm 25 shows us that God wants us to pour out our souls and our struggles with sin to him.

Now Psalm 25 is not an exhaustive list of struggles that we can bring to God but as I say there are many other Psalms of lament which cover struggles with physical affliction struggles with feeling great distance and separation from God.

Whatever they may be these Psalms function to help us see that however messy however entwined and knits together God intends us to bring them to him so that in general we will be able to echo verse 17 of this Psalm the troubles of my heart are enlarged bring me out of my distresses Now it is one thing to be invited to pour out our soul and our struggles to God it's another thing to know what God promises to do in response is God just a listening ear or is he willing to help us in these struggles and if he's willing to help is he able to help us in them so that leads us to our second question what should we expect from God and again we're going to go back to the same four threads that we see woven through this Psalm so first of all regarding the need for direction we can expect teaching and guidance if you look at verse 8 we read 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 and then verse 12 who is the man who fears the

Lord him he will instruct in the way that he should choose when we bring our need for guidance and direction to God he promises to teach and to guide now unfortunately this is not the sermon to go into great detail on how God teaches and guides but to suffice to say that God has given us his word that is enough for the man of God to be complete equipped for every good work according to 2 Timothy 3 16 and he has given Christians his spirit who guides us into all truth in John 16 13 so that is to say that we can be confident that when we come to God pouring out our needs to him for guidance we can hear him speak to us he instructs us and he teaches us through his word so we must couple our prayers with reading his word and we can be encouraged that we are not left to our own intellect and our own ability to figure out what he is saying to us although God does those gifts are gifts from

[19 : 57] God and he certainly uses them but rather he also gives us his Holy Spirit to be with us to be with us and in us and to speak through his word to guide us certainly God can and does use other means and ways to speak to us through prophetic ministry for example but the normal means that God has given to speak to us and to receive instruction and that we need to look to is through his written word now clearly though scripture does not address directly how to reopen schools under COVID-19 or a myriad of many other very specific needs for guidance that we can legitimately bring to him asking for direction but scripture and Psalm 25 tells us that God is more inclined to direct us through informing us and shaping us to cause us to be spiritually aligned with his ways of moral uprightness his paths of righteousness so that when we are feeling lost and in need of direction and look to

God for guidance God's way and the way that we discern to be the best way increasingly come into alignment so we can expect the teaching and guidance that our souls truly need now regarding struggles with enemies and opposition we should expect deliverance look at verse 3 the psalmist says indeed none who wait for you shall be put to shame they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous the psalmist declares his confidence to trust in God over fearing his enemies and that he knows God will safely deliver him the apostle Paul had a very similar confidence to declare if God is for us who can be against us in Romans 8 31 now such confidence for Paul and for the psalmist is available to us and it comes from knowing that just like with David and with Paul the deliverance they sought and they received it doesn't make enemies suddenly disappear or suddenly change their ways although God can make both of those things happen but they had confidence that their enemies would not overcome

God's hand upon them and in the final reckoning their enemies had no hope for victory because God is on their side God will rescue his people from shame we may not see that until the courts of eternal judgment for all to see but God will advocate for you and deliver you the third thing we see in terms of what to expect from God regarding loneliness is we can expect his presence look at verse 14 it says the friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him and he makes known to them his covenant now in the ESV translation which I'm reading from with friendship there's a little footnote which says secret counsel and other translations use those sorts of language it makes no difference really because the idea is of a person laying their loneliness before God and finding him that he takes them into his confidence the king of the universe ushers us into his throne room to hear our struggle and he doesn't issue direction from afar rather he welcomes us and directs us to the seat beside him he leans over and he lets us be privy not just to any counsel not just to any promises but to his counsel and to his promises

Jesus said something very similar in John 15 verse 15 he said no longer do I call you servants for the servant does not know what his master is doing but I have called you friends for all that I have heard from my father I have made known to you the lonely have confidence to expect from God his presence and his comfort and then lastly for sin and guilt we should expect mercy and love in verse 6 we read remember your mercy oh 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 oh lord when we bring our struggles before God whether they're a jumble or just one single struggle and whether it includes guilt or the burden of sin or not at some point

I'm sure we've all heard the small voice of our conscience blended with the voice of the evil one that whispers to us God's not going to listen to you not after what you've done do you really expect that God's going to listen to you and help you with that sin in your life or in your past as I imagine I say we've all had that sort of temptation I would expect and we attempted with a response of perhaps one of two things either to give up coming to God altogether or just to try to make up for our sin and our failure by trying all the more hard to win got back God's affection and Psalm 25 speaks loudly and a wonderful truth to drown out and correct the error and wickedness of that temptation verse 8 speaks gloriously good and upright is the Lord therefore he instructs sinners in the way

[26 : 18] Psalm 25 reminds us that God chooses to relate to us not on the basis of who we are but on the basis of who he is and that doesn't mean that sin is irrelevant to our relationship with God but it means that sin is not an impediment to our relationship with God sin is not a permanent barrier to our relationship with him God chooses to show mercy and steadfast love to sinners and that is not man's wishful thinking that is God's word to us right here in this Psalm and so that's the confidence that we can have when we come to God bearing the struggle with sin and guilt we can pour out our soul and our struggles to God because of his steadfast love and goodness and it occurs to me that we have a glimpse a little more keenly of the magnitude of God's steadfast love and goodness on display right now under

COVID you see for me it just takes one child of mine to ask are we there yet for me to find my patience a little tested a little tried but with God I'm sure that it's not simply one of his children asking him are we there yet but rather his children around the world are crying out day by day hour by hour Lord are we there yet and our father does not once roll his eyes not once mutter under his breath but patiently responds with his counsel with his deliverance with his presence and with his mercy and with his love but having said that it is very important to know one final thread that is woven through this psalm of struggle and that's the thread of waiting in verse 3 and in verse 5 and in verse 21 we hear this similar message from the psalmist that for you

I wait all the day long and if we truly value the counsel and the care and the comfort that God promises his children then we will want to receive them according to God's time scale and not according to our own it's not that God simply enjoys keeping us in suspense but it is that in his wisdom not only does he know what we need but he also knows when we need it and that leads us to the last and third question we want to consider from this psalm how should we wait for God and in psalm 25 again we see these four threads for how the psalmist waits for God the first we see in verse 9 is that he waits with humility and in verse 12 with fear let me read those two verses 9 and 12 he leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble his way and then who is the man who fears the

Lord him he will instruct in the way that he should choose humility before God submits to hear to receive and to follow God's way it says to God you know best and your way is best I will choose no other way and the fear of God puts the consequences of not following him and his ways above any gain that might be had from following another way that God says is off limits and I tie those two together because of James 4 6 which says God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble the fear of God's opposition is to lead us to shun pride and that same desire for God's grace is to lead us to embrace a humble spirit in submission to God as we wait for him we also wait with confession look at verse 11 which says for your name's sake oh Lord pardon my guilt for it is great and in verse 18 consider my affliction and my trouble and forgive all my sins we've already seen that we can pour out our struggles with sin to God we wait for God to wait for God with confession means that we recognize that sin damages our relationship with God and creates interference between us yes we can and we should bring sin and guilt before God but not simply to offload it as if to try to get it off of our chest like some sort of therapeutic experience rather the way we bring sin and guilt before God is with confession and with repentance we take responsibility for our sin and for sin's consequences we say sorry sincerely desiring to turn away from that sin and trusting that in

God's mercy and his steadfast love that he will pardon us and bring forgiveness and power to overcome sin through the atonement of his son Jesus Christ to which we will return more in just a moment now these verses don't mean that each and every time we want to pour out our souls to God we have to list this kind of long catalogue of old sins reconfessing things as we go each and every time as if we didn't do it right the first time or in case that's just what God needs us to do rather these verses mean that we should never lose sight of the fact that we are forgiven sinners undeserving of God's help apart from his mercy and his love with no right to expect God to work to our timeline so we wait patiently for his thirdly we wait with obedience verse 10 says all the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies and in verse 21 says may integrity and uprightness preserve me for

[33 : 06] I wait for you even if you're seeking God's direction for a very specific path and guidance and it's unclear to you nevertheless he has clearly given us guidance for the way of godliness in his word and we can wait for God while walking out the way of holiness now clearly that can't mean that God only guides and preserves the perfect those who perfectly obey him we've just looked at how God extends forgiveness to the sinner but it does mean that forgiveness is not an excuse for ongoing disobedience God desires his children to enjoy blessing that carry on from generation to generation look at verse 13 he says his soul shall abide in well being and his offspring shall inherit the land but God has made clear that those blessings his love and his faithfulness are found in the context of his ways and we must be obedient to walk in those ways to enjoy those blessings for ourselves and that means that when God's ways don't seem popular in the world around us or the ways of our foes who oppose us seem to be very productive in the short term even though they oppose

God it means it means that with fear and humility before God we don't abandon his ways to take up the ways of the wicked but we continue to submit ourselves to God's ways in obedience and we wait for him the final thread in terms of waiting is we wait with faith look at the opening verses of our psalm verse 1 says to you oh Lord I lift up my soul oh my God in you I trust let me not be put to shame we wait for God with faith just as the psalmist does who wasn't trusting in who he was or what he had done to deserve God's counsel God's care and God's comfort but who trusted in who God was in God's steadfast love and his unchanging goodness and mercy now the psalmist had God's word revealed to him as it was in that time and we have that too but we also have the fullness of God's word revealed to us in his son

Jesus Christ and we have the full revelation of his gospel on which to base our hope in which to pour out our souls and our struggles to God to trust that he hears us that he wants good for us and to wait on him in faith and we can do that because we know that there was one who poured out his soul to God in the form of another song of lament and yet was not heard by his father in order that we could be both the gospels of Matthew and Mark record Jesus' words as he hung on the cross words taken from Psalm 22 my God my God why have you forsaken me the one who had every reason to expect his father's counsel his father's care and his father's comfort was denied all of these blessings choosing instead to bear the sin and the guilt of man and to endure the full measure of God's wrath against those things so that we could escape them and

Jesus' resurrection to new life declares loudly that his mission is accomplished that God wants there to be no doubts for those who trust that Jesus paid their penalty for their sin who turned from their sin and to seek to live out the new life available to us in Jesus Christ God wants there to be no doubt that we can pour out our soul and our struggles to him because of his steadfast love and goodness to us in his son Jesus Christ brothers and sisters as we journey through God's path through this life we should expect to face trials and struggles of many kinds and psalms of lament like Psalm 25 help us to pour out those struggles to God and yet we also carry in our souls the knowledge that one day there will be no more struggle there will be no more feeling of being lost and directionless no more sense of being opposed no more loneliness and no more guilt and on that day we will cry out to our heavenly father are we there yet and

God will answer yes my child you are there let us pray father god we thank you for inviting us calling us to lay our struggles out before you to bring them to you nothing is hidden before you and I pray you would help us to understand and see our struggles in light of the goodness that you offer to us your faithfulness your mercy and love help us to bring these to you help us to take hold of your many great blessings and promises and above all Lord help us to hold fast to you and to your ways in light of the great hope we have in your son Jesus Christ we thank you that we can come to you in his name and lift this to you in Jesus name we pray amen