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# Listening to God and Walking the Path

# Psalm 25

Psalm 25 has been described by some commentators as an A to Z of prayer. Modern English translations divide it into 22 verses, a reflection of how in Hebrew it’s an acrostic, made up of 22 statements that each begin with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet (Psalms 33, 34 and 103 are similar).

The American scholar James Mays has observed that, ‘Undoubtedly the distinctive theological feature of the psalm is its emphasis on the topic of instruction. It is the subject of petitions (vs4,5), of hymnic description of the LORD (v8-10), and of wisdom teaching (v12-14).’[[1]](#footnote-1)

It is also important to note that the context in which this instruction is offered is a relationship of covenant love. On three occasions (vs6, 7, 10), David uses the word *hesed* to speak of the ‘steadfast love’ of God. In verse 6, the word is partnered with ‘mercy’ and in verse 10 it is referred to alongside ‘faithfulness.’ This language powerfully conveys David’s unwavering confidence in God. He is not seeking instruction from a manual, but rather guidance from one who he knows is committed to him.

However, alongside this confidence in God’s love and commitment, we also find David speaking of his own sinfulness and waywardness. In verse 7 he speaks of ‘the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways,’ with similar statements found in vs 8, 10 and 18. The Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann memorably sums up this theme as follows: ‘This psalm thus offers what in Christian tradition are the characteristic marks of evangelical faith. On the one hand. that faith consists in a full acknowledgement of human need, hope and dependence. On the other hand, it affirms the full, unqualified mercy of YHWH toward the faithful.’[[2]](#footnote-2)

Throughout the psalm, we find a steady succession of requests to God, all of which speak of David’s wholehearted commitment to him. ‘I trust in you… Show me… Teach me… Guide me… My eyes on ever on the Lord… Turn to me… Guard my life…’ This is the prayer of someone who seeks, above all else, to live a life of integrity and truthfulness before God. It is also striking that alongside personal prayers, there are instructions offered to others. At times Psalm 25 reads like a prayer and in other places like wisdom literature, as if David is expecting others to look over his shoulder as he prays. He wants them to know of the blessings which will come to those who follow his example: ‘They will spend their days in prosperity and their descendants will inherit the land’ (v13).

**For discussion**

1. On Sunday, Trevor spoke about the pressure many of us feel to be constantly busy and productive, suggesting that this culture of activism has also found its way into the church. Do you agree?
2. In Psalm 25:4, David prays: ‘Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths.’ The image of walking along the ‘path’ is a popular one in Hebrew wisdom literature (see for example Ps 16:11; 27:11; 119:9; 119:128; Proverbs 2:9). How does this image broaden your understanding of what it means to live faithfully before God and to be attentive to him?
3. As you read through Psalm 25, what picture of God emerges? How might the way he is spoken of here encourage you to seek to be more attentive to him?
4. When do you find it easiest to be attentive to God? Is there a particular prayer practice, a time of day or a place you go to?

1. James L Mays, *Interpretation: Psalms,* John Knox Press, 1994, p126. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Walter Brueggemann and William Bellinger, *New Cambridge Bible Commentary: Psalms*, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p132. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)