

# ***“Lead Me in Your Truth”***

*Psalm 25*

**First Presbyterian Church  
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Over the next five weeks, we'll be doing a summer series on great prayers of the Bible. Next week, our beloved former pastor Russ Stevenson will be walking us through the Lord's Prayer. The other four weeks will be Psalms. Known as the prayer book of God's people, the psalms provide entry points for us into God's presence. The psalms are paths to the throne of God which start from all the various locations of our human experience. From places that are wells of loneliness, doubt, or anger, from wells of joy, guilt or gratitude, from places of perplexity or delight—the psalms take us from where we are into God.

I recommend reading at least one psalm every day as essential to spiritual growth. I also regularly commend certain psalms to people who feel broken, doubting or betrayed: many of us have no idea that Scripture contains expression of feelings as strong as the fierce anger we feel. People find it immensely relieving that Scripture is so honest about how our hearts can feel like a wasteland, or that we feel like we wish God would just strike down our enemies. We realize what a priceless treasure we have in these prayers that can both express our anxiety and then move us along to a place of peace. The psalms of praise can lift us out of boredom and distraction into bright thanksgiving.

One of the consequences of our data overloaded world is the flattening out of our emotional range. We stay slightly agitated all the time. Hyped up but not focused, vaguely depressed but not knowing how to lament and sorrow properly. The psalms dig us deeper. They sharpen our perception. They help us find God when we thought we were lost from him in the maze of daily distractions. I'd like to suggest that when you use psalms in your daily prayers, you read each psalm in three stages.

**Stage 1: The Psalm in my life.** When we read psalms, or better yet, when we pray the psalms we are reading, we easily find points of connection with our lives. You don't have to be a professional Bible scholar to relate to the psalms. The first level of our reading is about the link between the Psalm writer and us. Yes, I feel that, just like David did. Yes, I want to pray that just like the psalm.

**Stage 2: The Psalm on Jesus' lips.** We realize a striking fact about our Lord Jesus in his days among us on earth. The psalms were the prayer book of Jesus Christ! The psalms were prayed regularly in the synagogues and in the temple. And of course God's people prayed the psalms in their homes. People learned the psalms by heart. The psalms circulated in the minds and souls of God's people. Yes, this can be done. David Torrance recently told me that his missionary father could recite all the psalms by heart, even the long Psalm 119. People have amazing capacity to learn the word of God when having it within becomes the work of a lifetime. Jesus read the psalms. Jesus knew the psalms. We know that because of how often he quoted from them, especially on the cross. They circulated deeply within him. When Jesus would go off and pray all night long, he would pray as a faithful Hebrew. He would pray the psalms to his Father. It has been said that only Jesus could pray the psalms perfectly. He embodied them.

So the next time you are reading a psalm, connect with it personally as best you can first. But then consider these words being on the lips of Jesus. Consider Jesus praying the psalm one night after spending the day healing. Or after confronting the Pharisees. In the wilderness or in the back of the boat on the Sea of Galilee. Imagine his reciting the psalm in Gethsemane or coming out of the tomb on Easter morning.

We love our Lord Jesus. We want to know him. We want to know his heart. We want to know his mind. When we read the psalms, we are reading what Jesus read. When we pray the psalms, we are praying what Jesus prayed. We can read aloud a psalm knowing Jesus also prayed it aloud. Consider what it might have meant to him. Imagine what a window that psalm is on the heart of Jesus. We may not be able to go walk in his steps in Galilee, but we can, each and all of us, speak as he spoke, put the same words in our mouth as Jesus did when we pray the psalms. In so doing we know him more and we love him more.

**Stage 3: The Psalm for Others.** This is praying the psalm on behalf of another person. Maybe I'm not feeling exactly what the psalm is saying. But that doesn't mean I skip it. Or mark it as irrelevant. I am part of the body of Christ that extends through all times and places. I am part of the communion of saints. Someone is feeling what this psalm says. Probably someone I know. I can pray this psalm holding up that person in my mind, praying their very life situation before God. As we work through three sections of Psalm 25 today, I'll try to show each stage. First up, though, is a verse that undergirds the whole enterprise:

“To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.” There is the essence of all prayer. I direct my innermost being out of myself and towards God. This is the opposite of a turtle pulling its head inside its shell. This is a stretching forth. It is a risk. A gamble. Maybe there is no one there. Maybe there is no God. Maybe my so called prayers are just electrical impulses circulating in my cerebral cortex. Maybe this is just futile. Or maybe the one true God is really there. Maybe the great LORD I AM actually cares about tiny, insignificant me. Maybe this tug I feel to lift up my soul actually comes from God himself, his own Spirit returning to himself through me. To lift up the soul is to gamble that I have a soul, a spiritual part to myself, an inner being. And to extend that soul towards God. To risk that I can entrust my heart desires to a God beyond me. “O my God, in you I trust. Let me not be put to shame” Don’t disappoint me. Prove trustworthy O God as I risk my soul on your love. Now, on to the first section. The prayer goes on,

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.

Stage 1: I connect easily and deeply. “Lead me forth in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation.” That has been a highly significant verse for me through the years. Father, show me the way. Lead me out of the mess of myself, the mess I have made, and be the God who saves even me. God, am I the person I always thought I was, or was it all a lie? Am I really just a poser? Or a monster? Or a blind numbskull? Are we the family we thought we were, or have we done everything wrong? God, am I called to be a pastor or did you somehow get the wrong guy in this post? Lead me forth in your truth and teach me. For you are the God of my salvation.

Stage 2: How might these verses sound on the lips of Jesus? Can I imagine Jesus praying these words during his 40 day fast in the wilderness? He was on the edge of beginning his public ministry. Satan was tempting Jesus to think of himself as a dramatic messiah not a humble servant. He baited Christ to use divine power to *impose* his rule instead of the slow patient way of love. Considering the multitudes of lost, contrary, needy, cranky people, I can hear Jesus say, “Father, lead me forth in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation.” Don’t let me get this wrong. Don’t let me believe my press, either negative or positive. Show me how to do this. If I go down, the world goes down, so save me every day.

Stage 3: Do I know any people who might need me to pray these verse for them? There's the man who's lost his way in a swirl of deceptions. He's lied so much he believes his own lies. But he can't remember how the story goes and everything is unravelling. He wants to come clean though it terrifies him. Lead me forth in your truth and teach me. There's a marriage that buried some incidents that need to be confessed. It seemed like not confronting the issues was the path that would lead to peace. But it is all beginning to surface. The guilt, the anger, the dead spaces are all showing themselves. This far down the road, what do we do? Lead me forth in your truth, O LORD. Teach me, for you, you only, are the God of our salvation. There's an adult child thinking, "I don't think my parents are telling me the truth about their condition. They are trying to protect me from something, but they don't know I can feel inside my bones that something's going on. What should I do? Lead me forth in your truth and teach me."

2) Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions.  
According to your steadfast love remember me.

Stage 1: Do I ever outgrow the embarrassment of being young and stupid. I cringe when someone say, "Oh, I remember you from seminary!" I reply, "No you don't! That was clearly someone else you think was me." It's not just stupid indiscretions and excesses. It was the arrogance I didn't even know was arrogance. We thought we were the lords of the earth and if we were just cute and charming enough we could get away with anything. It's so embarrassing that I have to say "we" and not just "I". I wasn't alone in being that way—look at my cool friends. Oh Lord, remember not the sins of my youth. People got hurt and I'm sorry.

Stage 2: Jesus was sinless. How could he pray "Remember not the sins of my youth"? He would not have been recollecting definite transgressions of God's law. But Scripture tells us he grew in wisdom and understanding as the years passed (Lk. 2). That meant he didn't know it all from the start. Hebrews 6 tells us that Jesus learned obedience through the things he suffered. After spending a day interacting with tax collectors and prostitutes and adulterers, perhaps he prayed, "Father, I did not know in the early days how deep their pain goes. I did not know how betrayed they felt; how much betraying you and others scarred them. I just did not know. Forgive me for not knowing then what I know now." Or perhaps he just moved to stage 3 and prayed for others as we do.

Stage 3: Father, I know a young man struggling to find his faith again. I know a young woman laboring to make her childhood faith into an adult trust. I know a

young man who is running over people in his new found power. I know a young woman who wants to know how to reckon with these fierce passions, and she has done some bad things. Remember not the sins of youth, O God, and deepen them into adulthood.

3) Let's look at one more set of verses:

All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness  
For those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.  
The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him,  
And he makes known to them his covenant.

Stage 1: I look back, Father on the suffering road you led me down. It felt so rocky and sharp. Now it appears as a royal highway to your throne. Every next step seemed shrouded in darkness. Each step was a venture into the unknown dark. But now it seems like a brightly illumined path to learning the meaning of love. That was a road of loss and bewilderment, of falling apart and watching all that matters slip through my hands. But every moment was laced with your steadfast, never failing love. Every horrifying moment was undergirded with your faithfulness. In the worst hours, I turned to you and you gave me your friendship. You were a constant companion on the brutal way, and you made it precious.

Stage 2: Can you see Jesus on his face in the Garden of Gethsemane, facing the hours to come? The evil one tempted him to renounce his Father. The powers of darkness whispered that all his ministry had been in vain. God had forgotten him and next was only despair. But there in his agony, Jesus looked back on his 33 years and recalled his Father's faithfulness. Though the way ahead was dark and his soul felt abandoned, history told a different story. "All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness." This too, shall be a way to you, Father. I have kept your covenant. All have abandoned me. It seems you have left me, too. But I remember your steadfast love. Every path was made of your companionship. This way to the Cross will also be a path to you. I will trust and go forward." With the weight of the world on his shoulders, Jesus chose to view the suffering road as still made of his Father's love. And so he saved us. Now he gives us hope.

Stage 3: Oh Father, how they have walked a painful road. They have been sent down a path I would not wish on my worst enemy, let alone someone so dear to my heart. I cannot tell them that what happened is a good thing. It will never be good. Never be made right in this life. I dare not tell them pious lies or give them false encouragement. I cannot say they will see your steadfast love in this. But I

can see your heart joined to theirs I can pray out of their heart of loss that you would work from the inside out. If you are the God who truly entered the depths of our suffering, then Jesus in your faithfulness cry out through them, “All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness.”

The Psalms are the prayer book of God’s people. They take us deeper. They scoop us up. They expand the range of our heart perceptions. It is imperative for us to move beyond shallow half prayers and build robust prayer lives. We start with connecting our lives to the psalms and inviting the Spirit to take us further than we have been before. Then we link our lives and the psalm to Jesus. That we might know him more. Knowing him more is the only way to be like him, to be like him in heart trust of his Father. And that’s not just for the sake of being more spiritual, something I can take or leave. (Which means mostly leave, right, because as long as I feel fine, I see no need to go deeper and work harder in prayer.) But here’s the deal: you want to love people? You want to fulfill God’s purpose in your life? You have to link your heart to Jesus’ heart. So that. So that, you will be able to pray for others. I mean really pray, pray out of their hearts. When you connect to them that way, all kinds of ways to love them will open up.

3 stages of prayer with Psalms. Oh, let’s go for it. To you O LORD, I lift up my soul. Lead me forth in your truth and teach me. For you are the God of my salvation. For you I wait all the day long.