

## Time Alone with God

### Psalm 25

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*April 28, 2013 – Evening Sermon*

In our study we will be looking at Psalm 25. Last summer when Pastor Reeder and I we're talking about the focus for 2013, I was so excited because one of those topics was *Worship God*. The conversation just kept going and going and I started getting excited about the focus of worshipping God and from a personal standpoint I thought "Wow, I really need that. I need a focus of worship. Worship is so distorted in our society, our culture and my life. I really need to learn to understand what it means to truly worship God—corporately together with others in gathered worship and what it means in my own personal worship with the Lord." As I try to do each year, I began to prepare for the theme and I said "Okay God, I want you to teach me something personally. Use that in my life and grow me in this particular area of this year in worship." Because of that, the Lord has led me to spend a lot of time this year in the Psalms, meditating and reading different ones. For me, reading some of the Psalms is almost like stumbling into someone's quiet time, as if you're looking over someone's shoulder and reading their journal—what they are writing to God, what God is saying to them and how they're praising God. We will see in this study what a genuine interaction David has with the Lord and we'll try to understand what was going on in his life and take that to apply it to our lives.

I want to begin with a presupposition. We all love God. We want to love Him a lot more and we want to have a closer personal relationship with our heavenly Father. So I want to spend some time in Psalm 25 trying to figure out how we can grow in a personal relationship with our heavenly Father. How do you grow in any relationship? The obvious answer is time. If it's a close personal relationship you're going to grow in that relationship by the time you spend together.

Tomorrow will mark 24 years that Sonya and I have been married and we're looking forward to celebrating that together without anyone else. Our relationship began by spending time together. We had no money. We got to know each other by going on walks. She would walk with no destination and took me about 20 years to figure out what that was all about. I walk to go somewhere. She walks to walk. Then I found out that I could walk with her going nowhere and actually end up somewhere that would be really good for me. So I went on these destination-less walks with her just to spend time with her, together. I came up with every

excuse possible to be able to spend time with her and over these past 24 years we have found out to a significant degree that time together doesn't just happen. You have to carve it out. You have to prioritize it and time together is not always the same. We don't always do the same thing or have the same conversations. Sometimes we have intense conversations or casual conversations or sometimes about the children and praise the Lord sometimes the conversations aren't about the children. Sometimes we just exist together and enjoy each other's company in peace and quiet but it is time spent together.

We grow in our relationship with the Lord the same way. It is with intentional, prioritized, carved out desired time spent together. Someone who clearly spent a significant amount of time with God was David, a man after God's own heart. There is not really a particular passage in the Bible that says that but if you just read through the Psalms and about the life of David you'll see he spent a lot of time with the Lord. In this study I'd like to look at Psalm 25 and pull out a few things even though there is so much here, to apply to our lives. Psalm 25 says

[1] To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. [2] O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me. [3] Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. [4] Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. [5] Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long. [6] Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. [7] 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! [8] Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. [9] He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. [10] All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies. [11] For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great. [12] Who is the man who fears the LORD? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose. [13] His soul shall abide in well-being, and his offspring shall inherit the land. [14] The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant. [15] My eyes are ever toward the LORD, for he will pluck my feet out of the net. [16] Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. [17] The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses. [18] Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins. [19] Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me. [20] Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me! Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. [21] May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you. [22] Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.

There are three things that I want to bring out that exist in David and come out in this Psalm. I think these three things are the foundation of his relationship with

the Lord. The first one is the fear of God. Fear God. Psalm 25:14 says [14] *The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.* Aren't we after the friendship of the Lord? It is that close personal relationship with the Lord and that close personal relationship with the Lord is for those who fear Him. So you can conclude from that, that there will be no close personal relationship with the Lord without us having a proper perspective of God, a proper fear of God.

It seems that when we speak of the fear of God we have to be quick to define what it means to fear God so that we can rule out the part of being afraid of God. We are quick to say that fear means to revere God, to be in awe of God. To fear God also means to understand the wrath of God, who God is and what God has told us to do. We see the blessings of God when we see the curses of God. To fear God is to accurately see God as He is. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!" Fearing God is understanding that God is holy. When we have the proper fear of God in our life, we first of all understand that God is holy. We can't define that holiness in our finite mind for it's beyond our imagination but we don't ever want to reduce God down to our 'buddy,' our 'pal,' or our 'co-pilot.' We fear God because we understand God is holy and He presents Himself to us and explains to us what it means to fear Him.

In the Old Testament as God spoke with man, you saw that fear exist. When God came down on the mountain and said to the nation of Israel, "Don't go near the mountain. When you go near the mountain you'll hear the thunder and see the cloud. You will hear My voice and the earth itself will shake so don't go near the mountain." When Moses went up and talked with the Lord the Lord reminded Moses "I told you not to go up to the mountain" and I love what Moses said, "Oh no one is coming near this mountain." Why? It is because they fear You, the cloud and the earth shakes, the thunder. They fear You. They are not coming near to touch this mountain.

As we see God continue to reveal Himself in our lives He says that we are to continue to fear Him, we're to see Him accurately. When you fear God and see Him accurately there is something that is always going to happen. Therefore if this thing doesn't happen, then you're not fearing God. When you fear Him and see Him as He is you do what Isaiah did in Isaiah 6 and everyone else does it as well. When you come into the presence of the Lord, have the appropriate fear of God and recognize how holy He is, then you will recognize how sinful you are. When you come into the presence of God whether it be just to spend time with God during the morning or evening or corporate worship together or the study of God's Word and you truly see, understand and experience the holiness of God then you're confronted with the sinfulness that is in your heart.

What was it that Isaiah said when he experienced the holiness of God? He said, "Woe is me for I am lost. I am a man on unclean lips." I have had to ask myself the question when I get up in the morning to spend time with God, "Am I

approaching that time with God with appropriate fear or is God supposed to hang out in my office until I get ready?" Am I just assuming that I'm entitled to the fact that when I get ready He ought to be there? If it doesn't work out well for me that morning then I'll just get with God later in the day. When I call for God He'll answer when I call, right? It's as if I'm doing God a favor by meeting with Him or that God is blessed by me desiring to meet with Him. For me to do it is like a notch in my belt to spend time with God. That's not a reflection of the fear of God.

A reflection of the fear of God is like this. Let's say I was to secure an appointment for you with whoever is your earthly hero, I can guarantee you would clean your schedule to make time for that. You would set aside everything you possibly could to prioritize that because you desire to do that. Appropriate fear of God is to understand who He is and then want to be able to go into His presence, to be able to worship Him. We have to be careful not to take that relationship for granted.

David in Psalm 25 wants to meet with God, he wants to interact with God. As David is expressing his heart to the Lord look at what Psalm 25:6, 7 and 11 says; *[6] Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. [7] 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! [11] For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great.* David wanted to have this close, personal relationship with the Lord, this friendship with the Lord and he had the appropriate fear of God, therefore he saw his own sin.

He wants that to be remembered by God. What does that mean when he says remember me? He is not suggesting that God forgot him but he's asking God to think on him, to consider him. It's the same thing you do when you pray, "God remember me today. Focus Your attention on me today. Hear my prayer request as I come before you. Remember me." On what basis do you want Him to remember you? David has the appropriate fear of God. He is not going to say "God remember me today because I have prayed to receive you. I went to church on Sunday morning." David said "God remember Your mercy, Your steadfast love, for Your Name sake remember me. Don't remember me for who I am. I do not have a resume that warrants my presence before You. I don't come in saying that I deserve to meet with You today. I come into Your presence wanting You to remember me on the basis of what You have done in my life." That's a hard perspective to get our hands around, to grasp.

On one occasion when I was at Samford I had the opportunity to meet with the President of the University and it was a good thing. Went I went to his office his secretary told me to go on in his office, take a seat and he would be there shortly. I went into his office but I didn't have enough guts to sit down. I didn't feel like I was supposed to be there because here I am in the President's office and everything was in its place. It felt awkward because the way the secretary said it, it was like this is what everybody does yet I thought maybe she shouldn't have

said it that way. I started to go back out and let her know I'd wait for him outside his office because I had fear of the President of Samford University. He finally came in a side door and the first thing out of my mouth was "Hey listen your secretary told me it was okay for me to come in and be in here." Why did I do that? It was because I didn't feel like I deserved to be there. I was in fear of the President and wasn't sure how he would approach me being in there without him being there.

Then I think about the way I approach God. Do I approach God with that same sense in my heart? Do I approach Him as if I deserve to be there or do I approach Him humbly? I come to spend time with Him in appropriate fear and humility, recognizing as God meets with me that I don't deserve to be in His presence, but I'm here in the Name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. I don't throw that down in front of God to say He has to meet with me. If Jesus Christ doesn't grant me access into God's presence then I need to leave right now for I would be consumed by Him. The fear of God is a foundational component.

How do I know if I fear God the way I should? How do I know if my view of God is appropriate? How do I know if I really am doing what the Psalmist said? These are things to think about when approaching God. Am I amazed at His presence? Am I amazed at His Word? Am I amazed at His character or do I take that Word for granted? When I worship, do I see Him differently? More telling for me is, when I worship do I see myself differently? When I spend time with God, do I leave more humble than I started? If I don't then you'll have a hard time convincing me that I'm truly fearing God the way I ought to. Am I humbled in the presence of the Lord? I don't think being humbled in the presence of the Lord is something that you ought to do. In other words, when you spend time with God make sure you're humbled before you leave. I think being humbled in the presence of the Lord is what happens if you truly are in the presence of the Lord. In other words, it's not a choice that you make where you say "I need to humble myself now that I'm in God's presence" but it's now that you are in God's Word and have opened yourself up to spend time in this relationship with the Lord, you are humbled by His presence.

How can I grow in fear of God? I will give you three things. One, spend more time in His Word and focus upon His character. Focus on who He is and how He is described in Scripture and His decisions. Two, spend more time in corporate worship and in hearing the Word of God so that you can be challenged and encouraged to fear God appropriately. Three, spend more time with Him alone so that you can get to know Him more accurately. So the first thing I have pointed out from Psalm 25 is to fear God.

Secondly, is to trust God. Psalm 25:2–3 says *[2] O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me. [3] Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.* Is it just me or do you get annoyed when someone tells you to trust

God? I get annoyed when someone says that even though what I'm sharing is conveying that I'm really not trusting God. Now my annoyance is just pride but I have had hard time hearing someone tell me that because it is calling into question whether or not I really am trusting God. Trusting God is hard and difficult. By the very nature of what trust is it is hard to make yourself trust. It's hard to even say I'm going to trust God more. It's not just a direct action of the will of man to trust, to have faith but God calls us as we see the Psalmist say "O God in You I trust."

I want you to see how this unfolds because I love this pattern here in Psalm 25. I think this is a very honest expression of the Psalmist struggling to trust God. The first thing the Psalmist does is make a declaration of trusting God; *O my God, in you I trust*. Then he makes a request that is inconsistent with his declaration; *let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me*. I thought you trusted God. Why do you need to ask that? If you're trusting God you don't need to ask that. So he first makes a declaration and then a request to God. He asks God that his enemies not exult over him because he is struggling with trusting God. Then he gives himself a reminder of truth; *Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous*. In other words, there are those things that we know to be true in our mind but it takes a while, maybe a lifetime for them to be digested into our heart and into our gut, so that we really do own them. Sometimes when we think we do own them we get challenged yet again so there is a new situation put before us.

So I can make a declaration saying "I can trust God with all things in my life." Then the phone rings and it's one of my kids, now all of sudden the trust starts to shake. Then I say "Please God, make this work out." Now I have already declared that God is trustworthy and I trust God and I've made this request to Him that things work out. Now what do I have to do because now I'm in a battle? I'm in a battle of what I have declared to be true and what my emotions are doing inside of me. What has to win out? It is truth. The Psalmist goes to truth. He reminds himself of Scripture. He is disciplining himself to let Scripture trump his emotions. That's spiritual maturity. That comes from a personal, close walk with the Lord. When our emotions challenge what we know in our head to be true, the declarations we would make, then Scripture needs to be the trump for that.

A couple of months ago Pastor Reeder and I were meeting on a Monday morning and during our meeting he asked me four times "Do you have anything else?" We had only been meeting for about 6 or 7 minutes and I thought "Yeah, I have a notebook full of things I want to go over." We have this meeting every week and so I said "Pastor, why don't we go over your list first?" He said, "Okay, I think I may have cancer." I said, "What?" Then he began to share with me how he had been to the doctor and all he had been through. The numbers weren't that bad but it was enough to be concerned about it and how he needed follow-up appointments. For a while there the days kind of seemed like weeks and months, waiting for the next test and what was to happen next. I want to tell you two

things you've probably not noticed about our pastor. One he is a bit of a studier. He could tell you things about the Civil War that you'd never find in a text book. Two, he is a verbal processor.

As he began to process this information of cancer in his life he began to do some unbelievable study on this and seek counsel from Godly people. Information just poured in. For about three to four weeks it was not yet defined as to what he was dealing with but I saw this pattern in him. He would basically communicate with me in one way or another every day that he really didn't want cancer. Two, he would say "I learned this about it." Three, he would then say "God's Word says..." What I watched him do almost every day during this time was what the Psalmist is doing here in Psalm 25. I trust in the Lord in all things. My gut is not feeling trusting. My body is shaking in terms of trust. My heart is quivering in terms of trust so what do I do? I remind myself of God's Word. That's one of the reasons God has given His Word to us, so that we can take it, digest it and trust Him in all things.

I don't know what you're dealing with right now but I would be shocked if you couldn't say "I know I can trust God but I'm feeling weak or quivery about trusting Him because every time I talk about it I get that knot in my stomach and I feel like I'm failing before the Lord." You're in good company. We are all in this together so it is hard to trust God.

What do we have to do? We have to make sure that the Word of God becomes our trump so that we don't set our stake in the ground based upon our emotions but we set our stake in the ground based upon what the Word of God says. We will see Him play out all these different things. God's timing is not your timing and He has been intentionally trying to teach us that. He does things in a different time span than I would do things. He works things out because He is accomplishing His good and perfect will and we see it time and time again. We would think that when we go through something difficult that the next time it comes around we'd be fine and yet it's hard to trust God.

So what do you do when you find it difficult to trust God? You spend more time in His Word. One of the things that help me understand the sovereign will of the Lord is when I spend time in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament there are these stories that play their way all the way out and at the beginning of the story I tend to ask myself "Why did they do it that way? Why would God do that?" Then I watch it play out and see how He fulfills His promises. As you're learning through the Old Testament and you go through about three or four pages, then you've gone through about a hundred years. Do you know why that is hard to apply to our life? It is because about three or four pages is about ten minutes in our life. So we want it all to work out right now. We are impatient before the Lord.

So when we spend time in His Word it gives us an eternal perspective. We need to spend time in corporate worship. We need to spend time hearing from His

people. We need to spend time alone with God. As we spend time alone with God we find out that God is trustworthy. Even though we don't feel like we can trust Him, we know that we can. He cannot or will not contradict Himself. So we fear God and trust God.

Thirdly, we follow God. Psalm 25:12 says [12] *Who is the man who fears the LORD? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.* In other words, God desires to meet with, instruct you in His ways because His ways are not your ways. He allows us to choose different paths and yet He sovereignly governs over us to train us and to disciple us to be able to make right choices before Him. David desired to walk in the ways of the Lord.

Psalm 25:4–5 says [4] *Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.* [5] *Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.* I love the way the Psalmist says this. God wants to instruct us in His way. We want to be instructed by God so God is going to teach us, lead us and reveal to us the decisions we ought to make. That makes perfect sense to me but I love the word used here in the ESV to set this aside. He makes all those statements under one very comprehensive and unique request; “God, make me to know Your way.” That goes far beyond just teach or instruction. As a matter of fact, there is an implicit humility in the statement “God, make me to know Your way.” I could very easily with pride in my mind, say “God if You'll instruct me in Your way, I'll do it.” Or “God, if You'll just lead me since I'm not so good at instruction, then I'll follow You every step of the way.” When David says “Make me to follow Your way” he was understanding that he is prone to wander away from the ways of the Lord. So he is saying to the Lord “Don't just tell me which way to go or just lead me down the path, but make me to know Your way.”

Praise the Lord when I was a little boy, my dad was committed to making me know his way. My dad was committed not to just instructing me, but he was committed to making me know his way. I have thought through very recently the many touches of my father. My father was not a very touchy person. When he touched it had purpose and most of the time accomplished his purpose. He had a variety of ways to make me know his way. When he used to pat me on the small of my neck it got my attention. It was loving and it was a way of telling me to pay attention to something. Sometimes he had like a vice grip around the neck and you didn't really have any more control of your body for none of your extremities worked, but in this grip he could turn my head as well as my whole body to direct me more towards what he wanted me to see. So it started with a gentle pat and then went to the more controlling pat.

When I was a little boy and my dad would rub my hair that meant “You're a mess, but I love you.” I know that because I do the same thing with my kids. Then he had a way of taking that hand and submerging it into my hair and grabbing my skull to direct me to something. He also could take one finger, put it under my



chin and lift my chin up to communicate eye to eye. It wasn't abuse. It was just a gentle direction. Then sometimes he would go to the full facial holding of the jaw bone, eye to eye, nose touching to make sure I understood. In other words, he tried a variety of ways to be able to make me know his way, most of which, to be honest, I resisted, because all I wanted was for him to tell me and I'd do it and if I didn't do it then I'd take the consequences. It's my life.

Praise the Lord, not only was my earthly father, but my heavenly Father is committed to making me know His way. This is a statement of perspective though. I know God is committed to making you know His way and I am confident that He who began a good work in you will carry out that work until completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6). That is a statement about God's intent to make you know His way. The question I have for you is, are you committed to saying "God, make me know Your way"? It's a hard prayer. It's a hard request to the Lord because that means you are saying "God, do whatever it takes to make me walk in Your ways. God, I accept whatever is necessary for me to be obedient to You, to walk in Your ways."

As David is expressing that to the Lord you realize this is not just an event. You don't read that and think "I wonder what particular thing was happening here." No, this is daily. David says "I wait for You all the day." When you wake up tomorrow morning you say "Lord, make me today to know Your way. Convict me by Your Word. If it's a gentle reminder you want to use in my life then so be it but Lord, if it means that circumstances in my life have to change to get my attention or You need to shake my world, then so be it for Your great Name sake. Please make me to know and follow Your way.

It's interesting that David makes this statement of wanting to be made to know His way and then he has to remind himself of truth. It's like he gulped when he prayed that before the Lord, "Oh my goodness, what have I prayed?" Psalm 25:8–10 says *[8] Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. [9] He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. [10] All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.* God is good and God does instruct sinners in the way therefore I need to submit to Him. I need to have a relationship with God that is characterized by submission, surrender and yielding.

So for me to grow in that personal relationship with the Lord I need to fear God appropriately, accurately see God for who He is so I can accurately see myself for who I am. I need to trust God with each and every thing that He does in my life. When it's difficult and my emotions want to overtake me I need to train myself to go back to Scripture and allow Scripture to trump my emotions. Then I need to follow Him. I need to declare my intent to follow Him. I need to awake in the morning and declare myself His servant and my Lord. Then I need to say "Lord, what would You have to say to Your servant today. Make me to follow Your ways."

I hope you will have some time to think your way through this. Maybe the Lord wants to deal with you in one or two of these particular areas or maybe He wants to deal with you in all of these areas – in your fear of Him, your trust of Him, your following Him. Whatever it is that the Lord is working with you on I would ask that you make the same application to that prayer and that is to prioritize personal time alone with God each day. Spend time with Him so that He can work in your life for His great Name sake. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for this time together in Your Word. Make us know Your ways and may we make time each day to spend time alone with You. In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.

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