

Learning to Fly

A Song Teaching Us to Learn How to Pray

| Vs | | Psalm 25 <i>Of David.</i> |
|----|-------------------------|---|
| 1 | א (aleph, ') | Ah, LORD! To you I lift up my soul. |
| 2 | ב (bet, b) | Believed in you have I, let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me. |
| 3 | ג (gimel, g) | Certainly, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. |
| 4 | ד (dalet, d) | Do make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. |
| 5 | ה (he, h) | Effect in my your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; |
| | ו (vav, v) | For you I wait all the day long. |
| 6 | ז (zayin, z) | God, remember your mercy, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. |
| 7 | ח (het, ch) | Have no memory of the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness. O LORD! |
| 8 | ט (tet, t) | Instructing sinners in the way, good and upright is the LORD. |
| 9 | י (yod, y) | Jehovah leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. |
| 10 | כ (kaf, k) | Keeping his covenant and his testimonies, all the paths of the LORD become steadfast love and faithfulness. |
| 11 | ל (lamed, l) | LORD, for your name's sake, pardon my guilt, for it is great. |
| 12 | מ (mem, m) | Man, do you fear the LORD? He will instruct you in the way that He should choose. |
| 13 | נ (nun, n) | Now his soul shall abide in well-being, and his offspring shall inherit the land. |
| 14 | ס (samech, s) | Oh, the friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant. |
| 15 | ע (ayin, ') | Pluck my feet out of the net he will, for my eyes are ever toward the LORD. |
| 16 | פ (pey, p) | Quickly turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. |
| 17 | צ (tsade, ts) | Rescue me out of my distresses, because the troubles of my heart are enlarged. |
| 18 | ק (kof, q) ¹ | Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins. |
| 19 | ר (resh, r) | Think about how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me. |
| 20 | ש (shin, sh) | Uprightly, guard my soul, and deliver me! Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. |
| 21 | ת (tav, t) | Verily, may integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you. |
| 22 | | Redeem ² Israel, O God, out of all his troubles. |

Psalm 25

¹ Missing letter.

² There are 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, hence 22 verses. But since vs. 5 contains two of the letters, an extra verse is needed. As the acrostic ends in vs. 21, vs. 22 serves as a kind of summary of the entire song. I've followed the ESV translation as closely as possible, while still being able to create the song as an acrostic.

The ABCs of Prayer

ONE OF THE FIRST SONGS we teach little kids is “The Alphabet Song”:

a-b-c-d-e-f-g

h-i-j-k-l-m-n-o-p

q-r-s

t-u-v

w-x-y-zed (OK, only if you are Canadian).

Now I know my ABCs, next time won't you sing with me?

Why do we teach them this song? For the same reason that we teach them to count to 10. This is the basic grammar on our language. If you don't know the alphabet, you won't be able to read or write. Getting a job would be much more difficult. Understanding the Bible is moved to the level of medieval peasants. You are at the mercy of everyone else to tell you the truth. It is not enviable to be illiterate.

In the same way, it is unenviable to be illiterate regarding prayer. I've met many people that almost seem to be. Hearing them pray, it is like they have no idea about the

Power they are tapping into. They pray **timidly**. Yet, this is the Sovereign Creator of the Universe they are talking to. They pray **abstractly**, generically. They aren't specific about what they want, and probably couldn't tell you if you asked them. They pray **thoughtlessly**, without purpose. Even though they speak to the God who brought order out of chaos. They pray **foolishly**, not with wisdom, asking for things that would make your head spin, not realizing who they are talking too.

Perhaps this is why an ancient Hebrew equivalent of “The Alphabet Song” is found several times in the Psalms. Psalm 25 is an acrostic poem (where each new line begins with the next letter of the alphabet).³ We have seen one already in Psalm 9-10 which is spread across what we divide as two songs, albeit with strange incompletes that begged for us to try and understand why. In these songs, the poets are trying to teach us the basics of prayer and song and crying out to God. Psalm 25 is the second such prayer in the Psalter. It is complete except for **one missing letter**: **ק** (*qof*, **q**). Also, as the alphabet is concluded in vs. 21, the last verse does not

³ The acrostic psalms are 9-10 (which I take with the LXX as being meant to be read together), 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, and 145.

start with a next letter. As such, it is not full of anomalies like 9-10. Its purpose must be even more basic.

When we [survey the poem](#), we see quickly that it is a kind of compilation of the Psalms we have seen thus far. Like them, it is a bold prayer, not timid at all; there is much purpose and wisdom in it. As always, it is well thought out in advance, it is going somewhere. Its themes are sweeping (though still specific). It does not have in mind a single circumstance, but rather an entire life of experiences upon which it draws.

It seems to take the major themes exposed as part of the human experience up to this point in the Psalter and discuss them all together with a single organizing principle. Here we pray about [God as absent](#) ([Ps 25:3, 16-18, 21](#)), [threats from enemies](#) ([2, 19-20](#)), [personal sin](#) ([7, 11, 18](#)), [God's instruction and teaching](#) ([4-6, 8-10, 12-14](#)), [trust](#) ([2, 20](#)), and [pleas for God to intervene](#) ([1-3, 15-20](#)).⁴ Other themes are [Honor](#) ([2-3, 20](#)), [guidance](#) ([4-5, 8-10](#)), [deliverance](#) ([2, 17, 22](#)), [forgiveness](#) ([7, 18](#)), and [faith](#) ([1, 3, 20, 21](#)).⁵ And what is

⁴ [Rolf A. Jacobson](#) and Beth Tanner, "[Book One of the Psalter: Psalms 1–41](#)," in *The Book of Psalms*, ed. E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 254.

⁵ [Mark D. Futato](#), "[The Book of Psalms](#)," in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Vol 7: The Book of Psalms, The Book of Proverbs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009), 109-10.

that principle? **God coming to his people in covenant to forgive their sins.**

The structure shows that covenant is central. Repeating words have a funneling effect, helping us to understand the way the song is organized. Covenant is its heart:

| | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| (2) Elohim | Elohim (22) |
| (2-3) Disgrace and Hope | Disgrace and Hope (20-21) |
| (3) Waiting | Waiting (21) |
| (2-3) Foes/Enemies | Foes/Enemies (19) |
| (4) Teach | (14) Teach |
| (5) Deliverance/Salvation | Deliverance/Salvation (20) |
| (7) Sins | Sins (18) |
| Covenant (10) | (14) Covenant |

As it is an acrostic of the Hebrew alphabet, given the broad subject matter, it seems to me that **it is teaching how to look upon our lives and learn to pray through the totality of our experiences**, highlighting for us which ones are the most important for prayers. The psalm can be outlined in the following ways:

- A. Contrast: The righteous/the enemy (1-3)
 - B. Request for instruction (4-7)
 - C. Covenant relationship (8-14)**
 - B¹. Request for deliverance (15-18)
 - A¹. Contrast: the righteous/the enemy (19-22)⁶
-
- A. Address the LORD with second person pronouns (1-7)
 - B. Third person (8-11)
 - C. Second person (11)**
 - B¹. Third person (12-15)
 - A¹. Second person (16-22)⁷
-
- A. Petition against wicked (1-3)
 - B. Petition training in righteousness/forgiveness of sins (4-7)
 - C. Assurance (8-10)
 - D. Petition for forgiveness/pardon (11)**
 - C¹. Assurance (12-15)
 - B¹. Petition for forgiveness of sins (16-18)
 - A¹. Petition against wicked (19-22)

⁶ Karl N. Jacobson, "Psalm 25), in *Psalms for Preaching and Worship: A Lectionary Commentary*, ed. Roger E. Van Harn, Brent A. Strawn (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 109.

⁷ For this and the next see Futato, 109.

Learning How to Pray

Learning how to Soar

If you want to walk, you first need to crawl. Crawling is the ABCs of walking. But if you want to pray, strangely, you first need to fly, soaring on the wings of eagles. **Flying is the ABCs of praying.** It is where you must start. What do I mean?

Psalm 25 is attributed to David (**Psalm 25:1**), with no additional information in any ancient text. Immediately, **his heart soars up** to God. **“To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul”** (1). Being lifted up is what makes it a prayer and a song. This is no mere duty he is engaging in here. In the previous psalm, which ended a series of ten psalms, “The Gates” were commanded to “lift up” (*nasa*) their heads (**Ps 24:7, 9**). It was a major theme of that psalm. This word *nasa* therefore connects that which ended a series to the next song in the psalter, thereby marching us forward into a new phase of worship.

One of the elements of worship is singing. Psalms are to be sung. They are songs. **Song** is that transcendent medium of communication God has given many of his creatures to unite their souls and bodies. Like other animals (**Gen 1:21**),

we have the breath of life (**Gen 2:7**), called here a *nephesh* or “soul.” **Birds sing**. Their song’s soar even as their bodies fly above the ground. **Whales sing**. Their songs sound through the waters, echoing in the depths like choir in a cathedral. **Men sing**. But our songs are not like the others. For with our songs, we can lift up our souls *to the LORD God*. While birds raise their bodies up to heaven, men’s spirit’s soar to the Holy One through song. This is what it means to fly. It is a spiritual endeavor.

Few have experienced it. Many want to. Few know how. They opt instead for the easy way like various kinds of drugs. These chemicals effect the brain in such a way that our own poets sing, “**Learning to fly, but I ain’t got wings,**” and “**Rocky Mountain High.**” They sing about that which makes them high. So does David. But it isn’t drugs! Some believe that their drugs create “doors” (even naming bands after such ideas) through which the soul can travel to meet beings on the other side. David goes to the other side. But in a way that is not forbidden.

Soaring uncontrollably through hallucinogenics or stimulants or depressants is a poor escape considering what the Holy Spirit does for his people. “**Like an eagle that stirs**

up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions, the LORD alone guided him, no foreign god was with him” (Dt 32:11-12). It is His job to take the worshiper higher, up to heaven itself. He does this not merely through song, but through prayer, even uttering them for us when words fail with groans that words cannot express. This lifting up of the soul to God means that you are enraptured by who he is, what he has done, and what he has promised to do.

But the Christians is not getting high merely through a musical experience, though too many try to. A human heart *can* soar to God simply through the music (Beethoven does it for me), but he is taken into God’s holy throne room only when there are words full of proper content. We pray with words, not with experiences. We go boldly into the throne room through prayers. The songs we are talking about are prayerful songs. We do not have David’s tune, but we have his lyric. Thus, this is not just a song, but also a prayer filled with words that teach us how to pray, how to lift up our souls when they are beaten down by various boots into the mud of life.

It is the lifting up, not of any words, but of *proper kinds of words* through song that we find lifting people up throughout the Bible. “O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!” (Isa 40:9 KJV). In our song today, the good news comes in the midst of various trials and tribulations that cannot keep David’s soul down forever. With them, he teaches us how to fly.

Trusting in God

As I said, we learn to spiritually fly when songs have biblical content. These work in tandem with melodies that fit the message. As Isaiah shows, the content **must focus on the gospel** to one degree or another. And so it starts in Psalm 25. “O my God, in you I trust.” It is interesting that our coins in America say, “In God We Trust,” which is very similar to this, with one exception. This is “my” God, and David’s God isn’t just any god. His God is Yahweh. Many who say this as Americans certainly mean this, but many don’t, and our coins never tell us which god we trust in.

David does. His God is Yahweh. And the same holds in the rest of the Bible: “For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many)” (1Co 8:5 KJV), “Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1Co 8:6 ESV).

The word used is “trust” (Heb: *batach*; Gk: *peithomai*). The Greek word forms the basis of *pisteuo* (Lat: *fides*) which has the meaning to **put faith in** or to let oneself be convinced or persuaded. Here he is draws attention to the object and ground of hope which lies in God’s covenant fidelity, election, and promise.⁸ This is good news. Thus, not any God, but *this* God is the one in whom he trusts.

It is based on these kinds of OT verses that we learn in the NT that **the heart and soul of true religion is faith**. It isn’t enough to sing a song, to feel its melody in your soul. Nor is it enough to sing great words in a kind of dutiful lip-service. No, the words arise out of trust. It is because he trusts that his soul is lifted up. And he says so to God in the

⁸ O. Becker, “Faith, Persuade, Belief, Unbelief,” ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 588.

form of prayer. Part of prayer is telling God that you trust him. And thus, faith in Christ is what the Spirit uses to make you fly. Therefore, the psalm begs me to ask you if you have hope in *this* God. Do you trust him? What does that mean? The rest of the song helps us answer that very important question.

“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; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous” (Ps 25:2-3). This is a rather complicated couple of verses, especially in our day which has been so powerfully shaped by the “Self-Esteem” movement.

Psychology Today has an article that is instantly accessible when you google *shame* called “Eleven Reasons Never to Shame Anyone.”⁹ The article moves back and forth between feeling shame and being shamed. It says some interesting things, also some pretty bad ones. There are entire cultures of shame (like Japan) where shame and the threat of ostracism are used to make people do what you want them to do. This is opposed to a culture of guilt, which is much

⁹ Bella DePaulo, “11 Reasons Never to Shame Anyone,” *PsychologyToday* (Jun 11, 2015), <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/living-single/201506/11-reasons-never-shame-anyone>

more of what we have over here. “Shame cultures are typically based on the concepts of pride and honor, and appearances are what counts, as opposed to individual conscience in guilt cultures.”¹⁰ This isn’t the place to discuss the merits or demerits of such things.

Rather, it is to get us **thinking about shame**. What is “shame”? It is defined as, “**A painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behavior.**” This, of course, presupposes that you can actually do wrong and foolish things, which quite frankly, much of our society denies (so long as they are the one doing the thing, it rarely seems to work the other way though). Given this definition, it seems that David is asking for something we might knee-jerk in the wrong direction when we read it. So what is he asking?

He is **asking God not to let him fall into sin**. You need to ask this in your prayers. If he does this, his enemies will exult over him. “**See, we told you so. You religious hypocrite! Why should we follow a man like that?**” This in turn helps us to understand the next line. It talks about **waiting for God**. This obviously refers to patience,

¹⁰ Wiki: “Guilt Society.”

something that most of us want right now! But what does it mean to wait for God? Just sit there and hope that he comes in a vision or something?

First, in parallelism, it means **to trust him**. To wait for God means to trust God. It is an act of faith. In turn, part of faith is therefore to wait upon the LORD. Notice the parallel:

In you I trust; let me not be put to shame
None who wait for you shall be put to shame

Second, also in parallelism, it means **to be loyal or true**. We saw how chasing after worthless gods is a form of treachery, disloyalty (**Ps 24:4; Jer 18:15**). This is a basic stance of your life. Who is your God? In which God do you put your trust? But part of this, in turn, is obedience. To be wantonly treacherous is to act in deceit, betraying in the most unfair and often brutal ways. They not only turn their allegiance against the Lord and his anointed, but do so with wicked hands. To wait for the God is to do the opposite of these things. And this is part of what it means to trust him and therefore to fly up to him in prayer.

Trusting, Knowing, and Doing God's Ways

This becomes the songs segue into [the psalmist's desire to obey God](#). We will follow the outline of pronouns (above) as we move forward. The second person pronouns continue from [vs. 4-6](#). “[Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths](#)” (4). And in parallel, “[Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long](#)” (5). With “you,” David is talking to God, not about God.

Notice how it ends with waiting, confirming what we have just said about obedience, for these verses are all about obedience. The words here are [his ways](#) (*derek*) and [his paths](#) (*orach*) and [his truth](#) (*emeth*). How are you to walk on this journey of life? On the path, which Jesus calls the narrow road that few find. This narrow road is the ways and paths God has chosen for us to live. They are summarized by the word “truth.” As such, his ways are not falsehood. He is not lying to you about the ways he tells you to go. Nor is he tricking you about where it leads, even if it goes through the valley of the shadow of death. You are to ask God in prayer that he would make you walk in these ways.

The word “truth” can refer to God’s laws, the things he commands. “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic 6:8). Notice walking with God. That is what you do along the path, you walk with God. “Enoch walked with God” (Gen 5:22). “Noah walked with God” (Gen 6:9). “The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked” (Gen 48:15). The Kings of Israel “did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and walked in the way of their fathers” (1Kg 15:3, 25, 34, 16:19, etc.). “Judah did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the customs that Israel had introduced” (2Kg 17:19).

In this light, it makes sense where the song takes us next. It is something very uncomfortable for judgmental people. For people who hate shame in all its forms, it is a terrible thought. But for people who trust in God, it is the heartbeat of their life. David thinks about his own sin. Not your sin. Not everyone else’s sin. His sin.

“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!” (Ps 25:6-7). This is terribly important stuff, so important that he will return to it several more times, including the very heart of the song: “For your name’s sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great” (11).

Trusting God’s Covenantal Love

Before we apply it, I want us to notice that this is not the cry of someone like Judas who recognized his guilt and even sin. Even those doomed to destruction can know that they are sinners, and can confess their sins. But you have to do it the right way. This is part of the ABCs of prayer, remember?

He doesn’t begin with his sins here, but rather with God’s mercy and “steadfast love” which are from of old. The word “steadfast love” is the famous *hesed*. And in using it, he foreshadows what is coming soon, the covenant. *Hesed* is God’s covenantal love, and therefore it is rooted in God’s own promises not to destroy those whom he has chosen to be his own. Therefore, asking for forgiveness comes as an act of faith rather than pure guilt. It is godly sorrow rather than worldly sorrow. It believes that God will judge in his favor.

Again, on the other side of the petition for forgiveness, “According to *hesed* remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!” What is the ground of this forgiveness? God’s covenantal goodness. Again, in vs. 11? His Name’s sake. Beloved, when you pray for forgiveness, you must remember that God promises according to his own Name to grant it, simply because it pleases him to do so *because he loves you*. This is the very definition of faith, trust, hope, and waiting. How can a heart not soar to high places when they know they have been set free from their many sins and transgressions, when justice says they don’t deserve it?

So, truth can refer to God’s laws, but it can also refer to anything God has told us. It can be about who he is, what kind of God he is, what salvation is about, particularly as he is in covenant with us through Christ. Beginning in vs. 8, the pronouns change (except for verse 11) to **the third person**. He is moving from personal reflection to a kind of objective observer who is now teaching through his song. “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 in his way. All the paths of the LORD

are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies” (Ps 25:8-10).

In this way, he is moving out of thinking purely about obeying the law as truth, and even more towards good theology which alone can help him do that. Particularly, I thinking of the gospel. “Good and upright is the LORD.” While not the gospel per se, it is certainly the foundation of the good news. God is good and everything he does is upright. There is no treachery in him. If he promises, he will do it. Do you believe that this is true? Is this the God you believe the Bible describes?

Because God is good and upright, he instructs sinners in the way. What kind of person is a sinner here? It describes him as a humble person.

He instructs sinners in the way
And teaches the humble his way

The way is His way. Notice the shift from the plural “ways” (vs. 4) to the singular and definite “the way” (8). Remember that way is paralleled to path. It is a road you travel. “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way

of death” (Pr 14:12). “The way of the fool is right in his own eyes” (Pr 12:15). Jesus is very clear about the way of God. “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man comes to the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). When he talks about “the way,” Psalm 25 is exactly what he is talking about. Christ is the Father’s “way.” You walk with Him on His path. He becomes the light for your steps. He becomes the Road you travel.

Only the sinner, only the humble would ever want to walk by this way. For it means giving up your own righteousness and submitting to that of Another. It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. It is not the well fed who need Manna, but the hungry. It is not the righteous who need forgiveness, but the sinner. And the humble person is the one who sees his own need for Christ. Have you seen your need for him? Have you confessed your sins? Are you humble in this way?

Even more, do you trust his covenantal love? David returns to this theme. “All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies” (10). It is tempting to turn this verse into the exact opposite of what we’ve been talking

about. “Oh,” you say. “God is faithful to those who are good. So it’s all about being a good person.” If that is what he is talking about, then why in the next breath does he ask the LORD to pardon his guilt, for it is great? And why is **vs. 11** the very heart of the song? And why does he return suddenly to himself through the second person, speaking to “you” God, as if he knows him? “For your name’s sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great.”

No, keeping covenant and testimonies is not just about obeying the law and being “good.” It is about the whole thing, including the testimony that he forgives sinners, including the covenant that offers atonement through the way he has provided. All of this is part of his covenant and testimony. Therefore, **vs. 10** is not saying that God is faithful and loving only to those who obey the law, but rather it is to those who remember that they are sinners and seek to be justified by faith alone, because they fall at the feet of the Judge asking him for mercy according to his promises in Christ who is the Way.

Again, does not the heart soar with such news? You see, this is the application of seeking forgiveness, beloved. You do so trusting that God will not put you to shame. Yes, you

confess your sins. Yes, you seek forgiveness. But then you believe that he grants it because of who he is. This is the way of salvation. He is the God of ... salvation (5).

Trusting God's Promises

It is also belief that God does not just forgive, but that he continues to teach and instruct us throughout our lives in all of his ways. And when he instructs us, we know and want and can do what he says, because he has given us his Spirit and new hearts to follow him. Therefore, he returns to the third person, “**Who is the man who fears the LORD? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose. 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 of the net**” (12-15).

Suddenly his teaching turns very practical. He gives six very tangible promises that you hang your hat on. **First**, he instructs him in the way that he should choose (12). Several things here:

1. *God chooses our way for us.* This is actually great news, considering that we are otherwise blind and walk quickly into ditches and holes and walls. God's way leads to life, and he knows how to get there.
2. *He instructs them in the way.* He does not leave us after confession of sin, but rather is with us as our teacher. And for us in the NT, how much more true as he has given us the Holy Spirit as a constant companion who never leaves, always teaches, always leads, always beseeches God on our behalf?
3. *This is for those who fear the LORD.* This fearing the LORD is the equivalent of the humble man who knows himself to be a sinner, because fearing the LORD means that if he doesn't forgive you, he must eventually destroy you for being his enemy who is wantonly treacherous against him. Craigie makes the interesting observation that "*who is the man who fears the LORD*" is parallel to the previous Psalms, "*Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?*" (24:3).¹¹ Ascend. Soar. Fly!

¹¹ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 2nd ed., vol. 19, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville, TN: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2004), 220.

Second, **your soul shall abide in well-being (13)**. The word is *tov* (good). But Spurgeon, as only he can, explains it well, “He shall lodge in the chamber of content. One may sleep as soundly in the little bed in the corner as in the Great Bed of Ware¹²; it is not abundance but content that gives true ease. Even here, having learned by grace both to abound and to be empty, the believer dwells at ease; but how profound will be the ease of his soul for ever! ... Like a warrior whose battles are over, or a husbandman whose barns are full, his soul shall take its ease, and be merry for ever.”¹³

¹² The Great Bed of Ware:



Carved oak bed, probably from Ware, Hertfordshire, UK, about 1590. The four-poster bed is famously over three metres wide, the only known example of a bed of this size, and reputedly able to accommodate at least four couples. Constructed in about 1590, the Bed was probably made as a tourist attraction for an inn in Ware, Hertfordshire. Ware was a day's journey from London and a convenient place to stop for the night for travellers going to Cambridge University or other destinations. Victoria and Albert Museum:

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/the-great-bed-of-ware/>.

¹³ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 1-26*, vol. 1 (London; Edinburgh; New York: Marshall Brothers, n.d.), 395.

Third, their offspring shall inherit the land (13). This is the old covenantal promise given to Israel that if they keep covenant, they will inherit the land God gave them (cf. Dt 12:10). It finds its NT counterpart in Jesus saying the meek will inherit the earth (Mt 5:5). And the Apostle Paul says this was the promise given to Abraham, that he would inherit the whole world (4:13). This looks forward, not to physical land in the here and now, as if this is a Name-It-And-Claim-It verse. It looks forward to the eternal realm, with the new heavens and the new earth. It is an everlasting promise with ramifications that last into eternity.

Fourth, there is **friendship with Yahweh** (Ps 25:14). What an amazing statement. Again, the heart soars. I said a moment ago that David speaks as if he knows the LORD. That's because he does. He is his friend. Friendship with God is something that was said of Abraham (Jm 2:23; Isa 41:8¹⁴). Who would dare think they could be like Abraham? David did, and he said that all who trust in him will be like him too.

¹⁴ "Friend of God." Carson writes, "This title doubtless derives from Judaism, where it is found in many sources (e.g., Job 19:9; 20:20; Philo, *Abraham* 273; *Testament of Abraham*); it is not found in the OT. Nevertheless, the title within Judaism probably derives from the biblical description of Abraham as the "beloved" of God." D. A. Carson, "James," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 1005.

Obviously, if God is your friend, then he is not your enemy. That means you treat your relationship in this light. All of the things we have spoken are to be read in light of being friends with the LORD. He is not out to get you.

Fifth, **he makes known to them his covenant (Ps 25:14)**. Do not take this for granted, for it is how God makes friends. He swears by himself to do such and such and his oath binds him to his promise. He cannot swear by anything higher. He ever swears imprecations upon himself if he doesn't do what he says. The way we know he does this is through his covenant. But I don't think he is merely thinking outwardly here, as if God tells you the facts: "I have a covenant." No, it is personal. I am making a covenant *with you*. Don't get all caught up on which covenant, for we are speaking about being in Christ, and the covenant we are under is the new covenant with all of its blessings.

Sixth, **he will pluck my feet out of the net (15)**. David does not forget who he is. Even after these promises, he knows he is still a sinner. The net he is trapped in is more often than not one of his own making. **"A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet" (Pr 29:5)**. **"The nations have sunk in the pit that they made; in the net that**

they hid, their own foot has been caught” (Ps 9:15). The promise is that the person who trusts and waits, who is taught and confesses sin and is forgiven, God will rescue him from his own net or the nets of others. He doesn’t leave his elect to their own devices forever. For a time, maybe. But he always preserves them in the end. Six promises of teaching that should become the ABCs of what God does for his children.

Trusting in Deliverance in the Face of Distress

With this he turns to the final letters of his acrostic alphabet. His theme becomes one of trusting in God to really turn, heal his loneliness and distress. It becomes a prayer for deliverance. “Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted” (Ps 25:16). Loneliness may be the greatest plague of our age. Most are always with people, always talking, always doing, and quite lonely. Loneliness is caused by the feeling that people just don’t care. We often don’t know how to communicate it to others. But God knows. And the Christian should never ultimately feel lonely.

Loneliness is a kind of affliction. But afflictions can also lead to loneliness. “The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses” (17). Being chased, being sick, being in trouble are all things that create deep loneliness and other people just don’t understand. They create trouble in the heart. These troubles increase. Therefore, we pray for grace that the God of grace would show his grace and turn to us as a friend.

“Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins” (18). This man just can’t stop talking about his sins in this psalm. Would that more people were like David. I’ve seen 10,000 posts on Facebook about other people’s sins. Not one in a thousand of them have been about their own sins. It is not for some morbid martyrdom complex that David is like this. Rather, it is because he knows his God. His God is holy. Therefore, he is not. And it always forces him inward, not in pride, but in humility.

It appears that David’s distresses, his troubles, his loneliness, and his afflictions are what is giving rise to his sins now. Loneliness turns into depression, suicidal thoughts, complete and total self-absorption. Sin. Distress and trouble and affliction create anger or indifference or hate or how

many other things. Our circumstances end up being the occasion for the rise of sin in our hearts. Some enemy is after me, so I hate them. David speaks to this it seems: “**Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me**” (Ps 25:19).

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

In this case, he is not asking God to go after them, nor to preserve him from them, but to preserve him from *himself*. “**Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me!**” (Ps 25:20). And he returns to the first thoughts of the song as he comes full circle. “**Let me not be put to shame.**” Remember what we said earlier about this? **Don’t let me sin!** Same thing in both places. And the final thought is, “**For I take refuge in you.**” All that we have said is summed up in that statement. You must be hidden in Christ the Rock to survive the storms of life and the storms of self that will destroy you.

I sometimes fear that what we've seen today is not the way most people would read this. Save me from them! Not myself. Get that confession of sin over with and move on to the victorious Christian life. What kinds of things can I do to merit God's favor? None of that is in this song. And it just goes to show why we need it so much. For we don't know the alphabet of singing and prayer the way we should. It is why so many have such poor prayer lives, why prayer meetings more often look like gossip clubs, why people are lost in their prayers, stumble, don't know what to ask for or what to say.

Start with these things. Start with prayer that is so invigorating that it is as if you were flying. Start with trusting. Start with faith. Know what faith is and what it does. Start with praying to be taught by God, and believing that he will. Start with desiring to walk with the LORD. Start with confessing your own sins. And don't stop doing it. Start with remembering God's covenant love and mercy. Start with the salvation he has given to you. Start with a hope that he will instruct you. Start with his promises and make them your own. Start with the Lord being your friend and talking to him as if he were your best friend. Start with

believing that he won't leave you or forsake you, but will always rescue those who call to him.

This is what it means to be a person of integrity and uprightness who waits on the Lord. **Vs. 21** is the last verse of the poem that takes up the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. “**May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you.**” Wonderful words, and yet there is one more verse. This seems wrong. Shouldn't the last verse be the last letter?

Scholars don't know much what to do with this. So they quibble about it being an addition or something that came along later. I rather think of it this way. For 21 verse the king has been prayer for himself. **Now he prays ... for you.** And David the king knows that Christ the King has promised to redeem his people out of all their troubles. And Christ the King prays this for you. If he is praying it for you and about you, don't you think he will do the very thing he talks about for you?

ABCs of Prayer: A Partial Check List from Psalm 25

- ✓ Fly to God in your prayers, exalt, and be lifted up
- ✓ Tell God you trust him because of you believe the Gospel
- ✓ Pray he would not let you fall into sin
- ✓ Ask him to make you walk in his ways and paths, i.e. to obey him and love truth
- ✓ Ask him to forgive you of your sins
- ✓ Pray about God's covenantal love, mercy, and promises to forgive your sins
- ✓ Confess it is for his Name's sake and because he loves you
- ✓ Ask him to instruct you in The Way. Remember Jesus is The Way.
- ✓ Pray for humility as you confess your sins
- ✓ Pray about his specific Promises (we mentioned six in the song)
- ✓ Ask God to be gracious to you in your loneliness and affliction
- ✓ Ask him to guard your soul and deliver you, i.e. don't let you sin
- ✓ Take refuge in Christ in your prayer
- ✓ Be full of joy, for the King of kings is praying for you
- ✓ Add more as you reflect upon Psalm 25 yourself