

# **Staying Centered in the Storm**

## **Your Personal Journey through Psalm 25**

By Dr. Steve Swartz

### **Introduction:**

Psalm 25 is an acrostic or alphabetic Psalm, beginning with each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Psalm 25 is unusual in that three letters are left out and three repeated by the poetic license inspired by the Holy Spirit. Reasons for an acrostic include the giving of structure, the display of artistry, and the help of memorizing. It is also a symbolic way of conveying completeness, as in saying, “I have covered this topic from A to Z.”

The psalm was composed by King David. He mentions sins committed in his youth (v.7), making this a psalm written later in his life. In fact, because of the similarities to psalms written at the end of his life (such as 31, 37, 70, 71), it is reasonable to assume that Psalm 25 was written retrospectively in his old age. It has the hallmarks of a seasoned believer in God facing the trials and storms of life.

I want to use Psalm 25 to construct a spiritual “trouble kit,” a series of actions to work through, perhaps multiple times, in order to walk yourself through the pain and grief of any kind of suffering. The whole Psalm is a prayer, but I will save prayer as the first and last items in the “trouble kit.”

**There are nine items in this “trouble kit,” each with questions for meditation to walk you through it.**

### **ITEM #1: Opening Prayer—Read Psalm 25:1–3**

This is an initial time of prayer, the inaugural “official prayer” of the beginning of your trial, or at least of the beginning of your choice to aggressively pursue the Lord in the trial. Like these three verses, the prayer has several elements. First, David expresses his sole dependence on the Lord. Second, he humbly asks to not be ashamed, meaning to not be disappointed by the betrayal he has experienced. Finally, he prays for justice, that God would deal with his enemies.

The idea of shame (“disappointment” in this context) forms book ends around the Psalm (see v.20) and highlights David’s wish to see God resolve this issue such that there is not a permanent

sense or state of betrayal. But more importantly, the contrast presented is that David is shifting to having confidence in God alone, that God alone will never disappoint. This is very important because one of the hardest parts about trials is the shock of how others disappoint you in hurtful ways. But God will never disappoint; getting off the unrealistic expectation that others should not disappoint you and instead thinking upward toward the God who will never disappoint is the first step to a proper view and handling of a difficult stormy time.

**Application:** Set aside an official time of inaugural prayer in which you are formally entering into this trial with the Lord by your side. This prayer can include expressions of dependence on the Lord, humble requests to not be disappointed, and larger prayers for justice. But most important is v.2, “O my God, in You I trust.”

- Time(s) and Date(s) of Opening Prayer: \_\_\_\_\_

## ITEM #2: Study and Plan How God would Have You Respond— Read Psalm 25:4–5

David prays four times over the same prayer: make me know Your ways, teach me Your paths, lead me in Your truth, teach me.

It can be very tempting, especially in a moment of crisis, to fall back on worldly ineffective strategies to deal with a crisis. Your sense of calm and peace can be stolen from you when, perhaps in an attempt to immediately ease the negative emotions resulting from the crisis, you resort to the first ideas which come to mind.

Instead, now is the time to ask what David asked and to respond with actions. David asked to know God’s way and be taught His paths. Since you have the living word of God, it is now your task to begin to search the Scriptures to help you formulate a plan. This may involve more than merely a few Bible verses as light guidance.

**Application:** Studying and planning a response.

- Does the crisis involve a need to trust the Lord at a high level? Then find several Bible verses which give you confidence and comfort regarding trusting the Lord:  
(references) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Begin to meditate on those every day during this crisis, perhaps writing and memorizing at some level even.
- Does the crisis involve relational difficulties which cause hurt and/or stress? Make a careful search through the applicational sections of Paul’s epistles (e.g., Ephesians 4–6,

Romans 12–16) and Proverbs 11–30 to firmly embed in your mind how you are to act to the glory of God regardless of what someone else does. This will require some work on your part, but that is part of the process of embedding in your mind the word of God in response.

- Now, taking the most relevant commands you found, how should each one manifest itself in an action which demonstrates obedience?

<b>Command/Principle and Reference</b>	<b>Action</b>
<i>For example: A gentle answer turns away wrath. Proverbs 15:1</i>	I need to make certain I prayerfully maintain a gentle spirit in my interaction.
<i>For example: Tell the truth in love. Ephesians 4:15</i>	I need to clearly communicate my care for the other and make certain my communications are truly for their sake and not just for my own.

- Does the crisis involve a need for wisdom when you feel you don't know what to do? (This might overlap with the questions above, but better to have much study than not)

enough!) Make a careful search of Proverbs again and epistles with direct commands. Perhaps read and highlight verses in James which may be helpful.

<b>Command/Principle and Reference</b>	<b>Action</b>
<i>For example: I cannot determine that what I want to have happen will happen, instead I am to say, "If the Lord wills." James 4:13-15.</i>	I must release an idolatrous notion of demanding in my own heart a certain outcome. In this wisdom situation, I need to continually ask the Lord to do <i>His</i> will.
<i>For example, for a financial crisis: Know well the condition of your flocks. Proverbs 27:23.</i>	I must respond to a financial crisis objectively, assessing the problem and the resources available to deal with the problem



## **ITEM #4: Examine Your Heart for Pride and Exercise Humility— Read Psalm 25:8–11**

David gives several tremendous insights regarding God in the midst of a crisis. First, instruction given to sinners (either the lost yet to be saved or the saved with a title of humility) is based on the upright goodness of God. Every instruction reflects His perfect character. Second, the humble (“afflicted” in Hebrew) are to be just and aware of walking in God’s ways alone. Third, no matter the nature or outcome of the trial, all that God does for those who love him is reflective of His lovingkindness and truth; God is never cruel to His people, and if His actions seem cruel, there is a higher purpose yet to be revealed. Finally, David is aware that a crisis means he needs to examine sin in his own life and ask God’s pardon for this.

**Application:** Meditate on and answer these questions prayerfully and honestly.

- What are the ways I may be tempted to act pridefully in this situation?
- In what tangible ways could I exercise humility with action and word?
- Have I responded sinfully to this trial, even in my heart? If so, how?
- Concerning responding sinfully to this trial, is this response a familiar pattern for me? If so, is it possible that God could be using this trial to assist my growth in this area?
- Concerning responding sinfully to this trial, what are the deeper heart issues involved? What do I fear the most? How have these fears contributed to my sinful response?

- What are alternative ways to respond which do not feed from those fears and instead give humble honor to God?
  
- Confess any sinful responses to the trial to the Lord as often as necessary.
  - Date(s) of confession: \_\_\_\_\_

### ITEM#5: Review the Fear of God—Read Psalm 25:12–14

“The secret of Yahweh” is the “intimate, secret fellowship granted to those admitted to the inner circle of friendship.”<sup>1</sup> But notice that these three verses begin and end with the fear of God. The fear of God speaks of the deep abiding belief and understanding in the all-powerful and perfectly righteous nature of God as a *worshiper*. Fear of God is most rightly expressed by true believers. An unbeliever may express fear of God to a certain degree, but if that fear doesn’t lead to confession and repentance, then the fear is insufficient to avoid judgment.

Verse 12 indicates that the fear of God leads to obedience and receiving God’s instruction without question. Verse 12 indicates the principle that only those who follow God’s instructions will “abide in goodness.” While the more precise interpretation includes salvation considerations, that ultimately only true believers will abide in God’s eternal blessing, the applicable principle remains that resisting obedience to the Lord does *not* result in peace or in goodness to abide.

**Application:** Meditate on and answer these questions prayerfully and honestly.

- Is there any way whatsoever that my response(s) to this trial have demonstrated less than total fear of God? If so, how?

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<sup>1</sup> Briggs, *The Book of Psalms, Vol 1*, in International Critical Commentary, 1987, 1:224.

- Submit to the Lord in prayer, expressing your total allegiance to Him alone regardless of what He chooses to do with or to you in this trial. Confess your fear of God to Him.
  - Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

**ITEM #6: Prayers of Request—Read Psalm 25:15–18a, 19–20**

It is interesting that most of the direct requests for help are made near the end of the Psalm. It is almost as if David is first undergoing a spiritual self-evaluation rather than jumping straight to requests for help. Verse 16 in particular is helpful to meditate upon. Think of this for David, the man and king after God’s own heart who at one time had thousands of people singing songs of praise for his mighty deeds, the one who took Jerusalem and brought the ark of the covenant to the capital of God, the one who ruled Israel for 40 years—and he says, “I am alone and afflicted.”

That’s the nature of suffering. It is isolating and makes you feel cut off from the world. When you’re consumed with trouble you can imagine everyone around you as almost living in a different plane of existence, enjoying life in a way that you feel you *cannot*. David begs God, “turn to me,” meaning to give comfort, to make contact, or the show sympathy.

And David simply unloads his requests onto the mighty shoulders of God!

**Application:** Now that you have worked through some of the heart issues in the previous items in the “trouble kit,” you now have a better spiritual perspective with which to offer requests to the Lord. **What are the main requests you have concerning this crisis in light of your previous spiritual self-examination?** Now, begin to pray through them as often as possible.

<b>Prayer Request</b>	<b>Dates Prayed</b>




### ITEM #7: Prayers of Meekness—Read Psalm 25:18b

It is interesting that David visits multiple times the subject of his own sin. It is almost as if he is using that reality to keep him spiritually grounded, even as he pleads with God for deliverance from his trial.

Since David returns to contemplation of his own sin repeatedly, then it is appropriate for you to do so as well. David’s request for forgiveness is not a salvation request, but rather a yearning for purity and heart-cleanliness before God.

**Application:** Meditate on and answer these questions prayerfully and honestly.

- What are the sins you know will most likely creep up on you continually through this crisis, especially if the crisis is likely to last for some time?

- Make a spiritual plan to battle those creeping sins which want to continually return. Include important Bible verses or passages, commitment to confess and pray about these sins daily for a period of time, and actionable alternatives to the sin(s).

Sin	Bible References to Help Me	Dates Confessed...	Actions instead of this sin

### ITEM #8: Prayers of Self-Examination—Read Psalm 25:21

Humbly, David asks the Lord to guard him spiritually, that in the midst of crisis, David would be characterized by integrity (“purity” or “innocence” in Hebrew) and uprightness (“straightness” or “honesty” in Hebrew). While David is certainly praying for those against him to get what is coming to them from God, his primary concern at the end of the day is *his own godly response*.

**Application:** You have already been meditating on and confessing ways you may have failed to please the Lord in this trial. Now is the time to pray that you would never waiver from your commitment to make the primary goal of this trial to have “integrity and uprightness” be characteristic of how you handle this trouble. Meditate on and answer this question prayerfully and honestly:

- Overall, what are now your spiritual goals during this trial?

### ITEM #9: Prayers of Intercession—Read Psalm 25:22

Verse 22 breaks the acrostic which ended with v.21. David is now in the realm outside his own trouble and has gained a more broad and eternal perspective. He prays for all of Israel, the chosen people of God.

**Application:** Consider and put into practice the following application in prayer:

Instead of 100% focusing upon the particular trial you are undergoing, your prayers can take on a much broader range of concern. For example, if you determine to spend 20 minutes every day of this trial in prayer for *others* concerning gospel: pastors, missionaries, elders, deacons, and fellow saints in immediate need, I can guarantee some relief from that “pressing in” feeling of the trouble which is so weighty.

#### **Conclusion:**

In the early days of the Scottish Protestant church, when the Roman Catholic were executing those who would not swear allegiance to the king as the head of the church, 18-year-old Margaret Wilson, a young presbyterian was arrested and condemned to death. She was tied to a stake at the seaside as the rising tide encroached. At one point, her executioners felt sorry for her and quickly rescued her as the tide rose. She was given one more chance to simply say, “God save the king,” as an oath of loyalty to King James VII of Scotland as head of the church. Instead, she said, “May God save the king, if he will,” meaning “May God grant salvation to the king,” which of course was an offense. Thus, they tied her back to the stake and as the water reached her chin, she bravely began singing from Psalm 25:7:

*My sins and fault of youth  
Do thou, O Lord, forget  
After Thy mercies, think on me  
And for Thy goodness is great.*