**31st August 2014**

**Psalm 25**

Have you ever been in a difficult trial? Have you prayed? How have you prayed?

How are Christians in West Africa praying now under the threat of the Ebola virus? One church minster in Guinea, Nestor Tonguino said “Directly or indirectly, we have all been victimized,” “This evil has greatly affected the church — in numbers and spiritually.”  Many church members refuse to shake hands when they attend worship services, he said. Some don’t attend at all. 

The outbreak stresses the need for Christians to share the Gospel while they can, said, another minister in Guinea Francis Musa. Church members call families grieving the loss of a loved one “and assure them of our prayers,” he said. Other faith groups offer bleach and cleaning supplies to victims’ families. Christians have an “opportunity to build our own faith” by proclaiming “that God is the only protection,”

“Prayers for this epidemic are made every Sunday — and every weekday in homes,” he said.

Church members there are encouraged by the support they’ve received from Christians around the world. “Your prayers are so important to us,” he said*,* “and we appeal that you continue to remember us in your prayers. ... We now look to God Almighty to save us from this killer disease.”

Two American medical missionaries who caught Ebola have been healed of their illness. We pray for our own British nurse, William Pooley who contacted Ebola after helping Africans in Sierra Leone. He has been acclaimed as a hero for going out there to help when local people were running away.

Iraqi Christians are praying for deliverance from the threat of Islamic Jihadists. What will the Christians in the churches of Rotherham be praying for this morning in this week in which it was revealed that 1400 young women were abused in that district, mainly by gangs of Asian men and that police and social services didn’t act for fear of being labelled racist and stoking islamophobia. What do you pray in those circumstances[[1]](#endnote-1)?

Have you ever been in a difficult trial and you knew that you were in the trial because of your own sin? You knew that you should cry out to God for help, but you were afraid to do so because of your sin, your faults and failings? Or, maybe your problems were not due to deliberate sin, but rather because of immaturity or stupid decisions.[[2]](#footnote-1)

Psalm 25 teaches us to seek God in the hard times, no matter for what reason we are in those hard times.

In Hebrew, the original language of the Old Testament, this psalm is an acrostic, where each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The psalmists may have used this form to help people memorize the psalms. James Boice[[3]](#footnote-2) suggests that in the case of this psalm, there is the dominant theme of learning or instruction. The psalm is a schoolbook

lesson on how to pray and how to live so as to please God and be blessed by

him.” I would only add, “in the context of difficult trials.”

1. **God’s saints often find themselves in difficult, frightening**

**circumstances.**

We can’t be certain about the psalmist’s circumstances in this psalm. It is accredited to David so I will refer to the writer of the psalm as David. David has treacherous enemies that are seeking to exult in his demise (vv. 2-3). These foes are many in number and they hate him with violence (v. 19). They have gained the advantage over him, because he describes his feet as already caught in their net (25:15). The psalmist feels lonely and afflicted, and his troubles are growing worse, not better (vv. 16-17). And, David’s repeated requests for God to teach him (vv. 4-5, 8-9, 12, 14) imply that he is confused in the midst of this mess.

If David, who walked with God from his youth, was facing these kinds of trials, then none of us are exempt. Sometimes I hear Christians bemoan, “I’ve been following the Lord and I’m a god Christian. Why am I experiencing all of these trials?” They think that if you obey God, He gives you a free pass from trials. But read your Bible! Many of the most godly men and women in the Bible went through difficult trials. You only have to look at the disciples of Jesus and the early church and read about the beatings, stoning’s imprisonments and deaths of the first Christians to know there is no guarantee bad stuff is not going to happen to you, no matter how righteous and good you are. Don’t be surprised (1 Pet. 4:12)!

However this psalm suggests that the trials behind this psalm seem to stem from David’s sin.

**2. Sometimes the difficult circumstances that we face are**

**due to our own sins or shortcomings.**

David’s painful guilt runs through this psalm. In verse 7 he

prays, “Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions.”

Apparently his troubles later in life dredged up the sins that

he had committed in earlier years. In verse 8, he refers to himself as

a sinner. In verse 11, he again cries out, “For the honour of your name forgive my wickedness, great though it is!” In verse 18, he again asks

the Lord, “forgive all my sins.”

Sometimes when you look back at your youth you may reflect “How could I have done those things? What was I thinking?” The answer usually is : “You weren’t thinking! You were pretty much running on hormones!”

There is a common excuse for younger people that they are naive and just learning. Youth is a time of experimentation, finding yourself, making mistakes. Wisdom, they say, only comes through experience. It shouldn’t, of course, stop those who have the benefit of experience sharing their wisdom in the hope that the young don’t make the same mistakes – but of course for wisdom to be shared there needs to be both speaking and listening. How, and if you speak, and whether you are listened to, is usually where it all breaks down.

David comes to God to ask for forgiveness. He doesn’t want to be under shame.

Shame culture is one of the reasons being suggested for the cover up of the Rotherham abuses. I read an article in the paper the other day from a Pakistani woman who was speaking about the problem many Asian communities have where there is a culture of shame which results in the blaming of the victims rather than the perpetrators. She claimed there is a denial that something evil has happened and a refusal to condemn the perpetrators. Instead those girls who speak out are shunned and often ostracised and alienated from their communities. She called on community leaders to take responsibility for the fact that taboos prevent others from identifying perpetrators and supporting victims which enable further abuse. She believed that those taboos need to be challenged. She said the Asian community isn’t unique in having evildoers, and the overwhelming majority of its men and women care about protecting others. The majority of Muslims are revulsed by sexual abuse and beheadings by Jihadists. However cultures can close rank because of the shame.

We all may feel ashamed of things in our, life. David in this psalm takes those shameful thoughts and feelings to God – who knows our hearts anyway – there is no hiding place – but unfortunately many of us continue to run and we try to hide. This psalm is good therapy. There is honesty and soul searching in this psalm. There is a reflection on where did I go wrong. What is my responsibility? What was my fault? What wasn’t my fault? From that renewal and forgiveness can start.

Am I in this mess, whether in part or in whole, because of my own

sin? No matter why I’m in this difficulty, what is the Lord trying to

teach me? Even when I get a trail, I use it to humble myself by

realizing my own weakness and mortality. I’m like the grass of the

field, here today and gone tomorrow. I’m dependent on God for

every breath I take and every bite of food that I eat. So, use your

trials to examine your heart and life before God.

If you conclude that your trial is directly related to your sin or

to your stupidity, what should you do? The tendency is to try to

cover it up and bluff your way through. But that’s a wrong approach.

There is a better way:

**3. In whatever trials we find ourselves, seek the Lord and**

**His wisdom for what to do.**

One of God’s main reasons for bringing such trials into our

lives is to get us to seek Him more fervently as we recognize in a

new way how dependent on Him we really are. And, if our trial is

due to some sin that was previously a blind spot, He wants us to

confess it and turn from it.

As already noted, David is painfully aware of his sins, not only

in the current situation, but going back to his youth. He doesn’t

just shrug off his sins by thinking, “What do you expect? I was just

a teenager!” He doesn’t compare himself to his enemies and say, “I

may have my faults, but these guys are *evil*!” He doesn’t belittle his

sins by saying, “Okay, I was wrong to sleep with Bathsheba, but

hey, I’m just a red-blooded guy who likes women!” He doesn’t say,

“Being the king is a tough job. So if I made some mistakes, back

off! I’m only human!” Rather, David’s guilt over his sins drives him

to confess his sin to God and plead for pardon.

David realises who God is. It would be difficult to confess to God if we believed God was out to get us. For Christians we know God through Jesus – we know the stories of Jesus forgiving those who come to him genuinely wanting to change. That is our reassurance, our confidence in prayer.

David reminds himself of the attributes of God. God is trustworthy and faithful (vv. 1, 3). He is the Saviour (v. 5). He is compassionate and loving (v.

6). He is good and upright (v. 8). He is just (v. 9) and forgiving (v.

11). He reveals His truth to those who fear Him (v. 14). He is gracious

and comforts the lonely (v. 16). He is powerful to rescue His

people from their afflictions (vv. 15, 17, 18, 20). He will redeem

His chosen people from all their troubles (v. 22).

As you review and affirm these and God’s other awesome attributes, it will encourage you to seek Him more fervently in prayer in the midst of your trials.

To seek the Lord properly, you must be teachable and willing to walk in His ways. Throughout the psalm, David asks God to teach him His ways or paths (vv. 4, 5, 8-10, 12, 14). The Hebrew word for

“paths” refers to ruts made by wagon wheels passing over the same

ground often. God is consistent in His paths or ways, which stem

from His holy nature. It would be ludicrous to ask God to teach us

His ways or paths if we were not seeking to walk in them. But,

thankfully, God instructs *sinners* in His way (v. 8)! We qualify!

To walk in God’s ways includes several things as revealed in

this psalm. It includes *prayer* (the entire psalm is a prayer). It means

*to wait* on the Lord (vv. 3, 5, 21), because His timing is not always

our timing. It means *being teachable* to grow in understanding. It includes *humility* (v. 9), because God gives grace to the humble, not to the proud (James 4:6). It involves obedience and awe *integrity and uprightness* (v. 21).

Running through all of these qualities is what David repeatedly

affirms, namely, his *trust* in the Lord (v. 2): “O my God, in

You I trust.” (Trust is implicit throughout the psalm.) Trust is behind

David’s repeated plea that he not be ashamed (vv. 2, 3, 20). I

have struggled to understand this, because it seems to me that

Shame-based cultures, such as currently exist not just in Asian communities but in other pride-based cultures. To kill someone to maintain your honour is simply to act in sinful pride. So why is David so concerned about not being ashamed? Is he just being prideful?

I think that the main idea is that David has gone public in affirming

his trust in the Lord. If the Lord lets him down and David’s enemies triumph over him, not only David’s honour, but also the Lord’s honour, is at stake. Here is a man who trusted in the Lord. Was he a fool to do so or is God worth trusting in? So David’s argument in prayer is, “Lord, I’m trusting totally in You. Don’t let me be ashamed, because if I’m ashamed, Your name is going to be dishonoured.”

That leads to the final lesson:

**4. No matter how difficult our trials, the Lord is able to deliver**

**us from them, for His glory and our good.**

We need to be careful to define “deliverance” biblically, not

superficially. The Bible is clear that it is *not always* God’s will miraculously

to heal us or to get us out of all our problems. Many of God’s faithful witnesses have died young through sickness or accidents. We often do not understand God’s ways. Our duty is to affirm by faith, as David does here, that the Lord is *always* good, loving, and compassionate. He is fully able to

deliver us from our trials, even when we were the cause of them because of our sin or stupidity, if we humble ourselves and seek Him.

There was a moving story in this month’s edition of Reform – the URC’s magazine. Justyn Rees Larcombe had been brought up as Christian, he had a strong faith in his youth but he said he grew complacent and drifted through life and took his eyes of God.

He was always an impulsive character, very competitive who doesn’t like losing. He started to gamble and after a few months had lost £700 and felt terrible. Instead of saying let’s write that off and stop doing this stupid thing he thought how can I win it back? I can’t give in, I can’t give up and admit defeat. His gambling addiction lost him his job, (he was a director of a City of London firm) his family and £750,000. He was telling things like his wife’s wedding ring and family furniture to pay off the debts.

When his wife found out she left him and he came to his darkest hour. He got down on his knees and asked Christ back into his life. He says this: ‘When you ask Christ back into your life, he changes you. I had to change my attitude, my habits – everything.

His wife came back to him though he admits she still doesn’t trust him. But he believes he is a new person – because God is the God of the second chance. . He believes that for every addiction thee is an underlying emotional issue – something causing this destructive behaviour. If you can understand why you’re doing it, you can block it. In the end, gambling was the place he went to forget the mess he had created in his life. But he realises that there are consequences of our sin. Some of the things the Lord has restored – his family coming back to him. His debts have been paid off. But there is permanent damage. His father in law can’t forgive him for example. He has set up a gambling addiction charity called Rethink. He recognises he is only one bet away from trashing everything again – but he does feel utterly released. ‘Christ doesn’t want us to be slaves to anything. I was completely a slave – so much I wanted to take my own life. Now I’m free.

May God deliver us from our trials, as we humbly seek his face and wait on his guidance.

1. http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/finding-gods-way-in-lifes-wilderness-richard-burkey-sermon-on-fulfillment-80446.asp?Page=3 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. A lot of this sermon is based on Steven Cole’s sermon: http://www.fcfonline.org/content/1/sermons/020109M.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. James Boice (*Psalms, Volume 1, Psalms 1-41* [Baker], p. 223) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)