

*If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.*

That Psalm is written in such a wonderful way for when we read, "you are there" the term is actually an exclamation of Thou! We pray walking and praying to walk on the paths of God.

Guide me in your truth. The term is not plural. It is the truth. Guide me in the truth. The term guide indicates a continual presence and constant companion. I never forget visiting the Hearst Castle in California. We paid a lot of money for the guided tour and our guide was horrible. We would go into the room and she would say this is the dining room. This is the dining room table. Any questions? Sometimes we think God is like that with us. God just gives us some directions and says any questions?

David says, "God guide me in your truth." Here is our posture of prayer of trust...walking with God. A God who reveals self, a God who is before us, a God who is also present to us.

As we enter this Advent Season, we find hope and trust in our God. Our God revealed self in Jesus. Our God in Christ has gone before us through death to resurrection. Our God has sent to us the Holy Spirit who is with us in every moment.

One last posture and that is the posture of sitting. When we find those sitting in prayer we find rest. To trust and hope is active, but it is also a sense of rest. This Psalm is very active. All through it are words of action and requests of God's action. However, there is all through the Psalms that little word of instruction and that word is Selah. Selah simply means to take pause and breath. It is an instruction to rest in this word. Although it is not in this Psalm as we enter Advent, I think that is what we need to do today. We need to take rest in the busyness of the season and pause for a moment.

Rolf Jacobson of Luther Seminary reminds us:

"Advent is about the church's faith that all of life -- past, present, and future -- is lived in the presence of God. Advent is about trusting the promise even while awaiting for the promise to be kept by God. "In Advent, the church celebrates Christ's coming in history, mystery, and majesty."



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In history: We celebrate on God's surprising historical entry into the world in the birth, life, and death of Jesus of Nazareth.

In mystery: We celebrate on the resurrected Christ's mysterious presence "wherever two or three gather" in Christ's name.

In majesty: We celebrate the promise that one-day Christ will come in majesty, wiping away every tear and emptying every grave.

As we begin this Advent Season... let us do so with hope. Hope that is filled waiting and trusting. Today we pause... we take a breath... and we say... To You O Lord I Lift Up My Soul, In You I Trust O My God. We hope, we trust and there we find rest.



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Trust Falls

Psalm 25:1-10



When I was a youth minister we would often play the game trust falls. If you have never played that game, you essentially ask someone to stand on a chair or a ladder with their back to the crowd and you ask them to cross their arms, close their eyes and fall backwards. You are trusting the 5 to six people who are in a line with their arms interlocked will catch you. It is amazing, first of all. Who is willing to go first and also those who are reluctant to participate, even after they have seen may others fall safely into the arms of friends and strangers? The game, of course, is designed to build team and relationship within a group.

Trust falls can be a fun game and a game that can build a sense of trust among others but lets be honest, such trust is not very deep. Falling into someone's arms in a game is not the same as trusting someone with a secret or a struggle. Trusting someone to play a game correctly is not the same as trusting someone with your money or with your reputation or a surgeon with your life. Playing a game is different than trusting our spouse to always be faithful and our co-workers to put the project or company first. Learning to truly trust is not an easy process.

What about when it comes to trusting God? Maybe it is harder to trust God, who we do not see, with those who we do see. It has been shown that helping a baby learn to trust early in life helps them in faith development. When we ask a child to trust God who they have only heard and seen in others, then of course them knowing how to trust God become either harder or easier.

In this beautiful Psalm, we find David expressing his hope in the Lord. It is an honest expression of need. To you O Lord do I lift up my soul, in you I trust O my God. On this first Sunday Advent we have lit the candle of hope. What we discover about hope is that we hope in the One whom we trust. Interestingly, the term for hope we find in this passage is the Hebrew word for wait. This word means both hoping and waiting. We know this to be true. We know that in our hoping there is waiting and in

our waiting there is hoping. However, who we are waiting on and who we are hoping in can make all the difference.

David chooses to wait and hope in the Lord. This Psalm should not be seen as a Psalm that is about a certain moment in life, but a way of life. Some suggest this Psalm is written in the time of Absalom's revolt against David and after his sin with Bathsheba. That might be true, but Psalm 25 should be read as a larger narrative in David's life and not just a response to a moment. There are other Psalms where it is clear David is writing in desperation. However this Psalm is more about an approach to life. It is almost like those moments when we take a step back and ponder our existence and our purpose. It is those moments that sometimes catch us off guard in our busyness, and we begin to think about what really matters and just what is the purpose of my living. In those moments, we are faced with whom and what do we trust. David responds by saying he trusts in the Lord.

Advent and Christmas is that yearly reminder about God's presence in our world. God came to us. It is a good time to stop for a moment and reflect on trusting God. When we think of taking trust falls, we think about the posture that is necessary. You stand with arms crossed and stiff as a board and you fall into the arms of the group. It seems to me that there are a few other postures that are necessary for us to take a trust fall into the arms of God.

It is interesting that just a quick review of the actual posture of prayer in the Bible reveal something about our approach to God and our need of God. There are those who kneel in prayer in the Bible. Kneeling shows submission. There were those who bowed in prayer. Bowing shows respect and honor. There were those who stood in prayer with hands open. This denotes the concept of being in one's presence. Standing in honor of this presence and then opening ones self to the other. There were those who walked and prayed. Many times this was in an act of war or their way to meet God. The Psalms of Ascent are those beautiful songs and prayer that the pilgrims would sing on their way to the Temple. They were walking prayers.

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The concept that God was with them in activity and non-activity is reassuring. There are even those who sat to pray. Sitting is a sign of rest. Prayer is active and it is also a sign of resting in God.

In the Biblical posture of prayer we find these concepts: submission, honor, openness to God, awareness to God's existence and presence, an activity of God and a sense of rest in God.

Let's think about these postures of trust in this prayer of David who is standing and with open hands. David stands before God and opens his life and cries out: To you O Lord, do I lift up my soul. In you I trust O my God. There are two important words for us in this verse that teach us a posture of living. David says I lift up my soul. The term for soul means our lives or our existence. It is the concept of all that we are. David is saying in regards to my living, I look to God.

We must look to God in the living of these days. When we think about our soul, we many times think about eternity. In this regards, we might say that we have looked to God. Many of us, if not most of us, trust God with an eternal hope. We believe that because of our faith in Jesus and nothing else we shall spend eternity with God. Ironically, we don't seem to struggle as much with eternity being in God's hands as much as we struggle with the present being in God's hands. It could be simply that we know in our hearts that we do not have any power over eternity, but here and now we have some say in things. It is natural for those of us who trust God for eternity to sometimes have a lack of trust of God in the here and now. After all, I am here and I am now so let me take care of the here and now.

The Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, has suggested one helpful approach to preaching and teaching the psalms is to ask what an "anti-psalm" might look like. What, in other words, might be the opposite tone of that expressed by a particular psalm, whether it expresses trust, praise, complaint or something else? So what might an "anti-Psalm 25" sound like? Might the poet say something like, "I'm on my own in this mess. I have to somehow dig myself out of this trouble. Since I can't count on anyone else for help, there's no point in paying any attention to God either. God doesn't care anyway"? The anti-Psalm does not look to God, but instead always looks within. The anti-Psalm speaks of our ability, our wisdom, our power and our understanding. The anti-Psalm simply says to God... it is okay, I have got this.

Yet, David lifts his soul, his very life to God. Why, I trust in you God.

David begins with a posture of confidence in God and opening of his life to God. No wonder David says this is my posture for life. To you O Lord, I lift up my soul.

This is the place we begin our waiting and hoping. Advent must begin with confidence in a God who came to us. Advent must begin with us opening our lives to God. In this season, we stand in God's presence with confidence and we lift up our very lives to God.

The second posture is that of kneeling or even prostrate on the ground. This posture shows humility and need for forgiveness. It denotes repentance and confession.

David continues that his trust in the Lord is for His forgiveness. It is interesting that David contrasts two characteristics in this Psalm. First, there is his sin. David says of his sin, remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways.

What does David's prayer remind us about when it comes to trusting God's forgiveness? First, it is a reminder of our sinfulness. David first confesses that he has sinned against God. Remember not the sins of my youth. David is reminded that sin has been a part of his life and remains a part of his life.

Second, David admits that his sin is rebellious. In other words, it is not merely a mistake, a misstep, a character flaw, a personality trait and that is just the way it is. No, David takes ownership of his sin and says it is rebellious ways.

David helps us name sin for what is truly is in our lives. First, it is a part of our living and has been a part of us from the very beginning. We have sinned, we do sin and we will sin. The word sin means to miss the mark. So, we must confess that we can never be good enough on our own. We, even when we try, fail. We sin. However, sin is deeper than this missing the mark. From the very beginning sin has been willful disobedience toward God. In this way it is rebellious.

It is the picture of the child who knows what is expected by her parents and says within their will I know what is expected of me as part of this family, but I choose to go my own way, do my own thing, I choose to be disobedient.

David says to God, remember not the sin of my youth. Sin that has been and still is with me. Remember not my rebellious ways. Remember not my way that is disobedient.

Instead, in contrast to his sin, David asks of God to remember him in God's love and faithfulness. There are three things that David says about God's love.

First, God's mercy and love is from old. This is nothing new. Love and Mercy are God's character. It is not that God has changed or may change. David is saying, "I can count your mercy and love because this is who you are God."

Second, David says look on me with love. Remember me

in your love. Many of us, if we had our way, would ask that we be remembered not by our failures but by that which was best in us. David is asking God to not look down on him and see his sin, but instead look down in your love and let your love O God be that which filters that way you look at me.

One of the things you can do now with a phone, of course, is take a picture. But you don't have to just take one picture. You can take several ones and choose the one you like. Robin and I were explaining the other day to some young couples what is was like when you actually had to take the picture with film and then send it off and wait. Of course the pictures would come back and you have paid for them all and you might have one that was acceptable. Of course only you and a few people were ever going to see it... not the whole world, so it wasn't quite as important. Now, however, you can take the picture, you can choose it, alter the lighting, the contrast, the background etc. Until you get the perfect picture. If your phone is like mine you can choose several preset filters for your picture.

Although it is true that God sees us as we truly are and not who we portray ourselves to be to others or even who we deny we are to our self, David's prayer is a prayer for God to look upon us through the filter of love. Remember me in your love. David says with confidence for God is good.

Here is the second posture David takes in his time of trusting; it is the posture of kneeling. David confesses his sin, but knows God will not deal with him in light of God's love and goodness. For this is who God is. David trusts God's forgiveness.

As we begin the Advent Season we need to be reminded that we trust and hope in a God who is good and loving. Christmas is about God's greatest act of love and that was to send Jesus to us. God's sending our Lord Jesus is the loudest word to be spoken. It is the reminder that when God looks upon us, God looks through the filter of His mercy and love.

The third posture for trusting God is the posture of walking and praying. We find this in David's prayer for guidance. Notice all the words concerning learning and following God's ways. Show me your ways. Teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth. First, there is the prayer to be shown the ways of the Lord.

Show me your ways. We are reminded that God is a God who self reveals. It is not true that we seek God as much as God seeks us. Even the desire we have to know God comes from the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives who

woos us and prompts us toward God. On our own we cannot just discover God's ways. God must reveal God's way to us. David prays that God will show us God's way. Now we must understand God has already self-revealed. God has revealed His commands in His written word and God has revealed self fully in Jesus the eternal Word of God. In Christ and in God's Word we find God's Revelation. We fine God's ways. So as we walk in this life we pray. We pray to know and understand the ways of God.

We pray that we might know the paths of God. I love that word paths. Paths mean that someone has been there before. There is a well-worn path.

When I was in Seminary in Louisville working on my Doctorate there was as in most schools a beautiful quad. A beautiful lawn surrounded by large and impressive buildings. If your class was on one side of the quad, you did not necessarily want to walk all around the quad. You wanted to cut across the lawn. There was a sign around the quad that said, "Please walk on the grass... but don't make paths." I understand that when it comes to keeping a lawn looking beautiful. However, I think one of our problems is that we like to walk in places no one has walked before. We like to make our own way and here David says, "teach me your paths."

There are two comforting thoughts here. One, others have traveled this way. There is something comforting knowing that you are not the only one who has been this way. We can learn to trust God because others have trusted God in the past and can tell us of walking with God. Whether it is the saints of old or the person sitting next to us in a Sunday School class, we have heard the stories of those who have learned to trust God. When we hear those who have walked that path, then we are encouraged.

However, more important this is the path of God. God has created the path. God has gone there before us. God prepares this. We are reminded that when we learn to trust God, we trust the one who is already before us in our unknown future. Before our next step, God is already before us. Before we reach the turn in the bend, God is already there. Before we climb the mountain, God is on the other side. Before we go through the darkest night, God is already waiting in the morning.

Psalmist put it this way in Psalm 139...

*If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.*