

In the midst of all the positives and negatives of all the modern devices that technology offers us today, the one that has been most positive for us has been the Global Positioning System, better known as the GPS. Wherever you are a GPS allows you to find your way to wherever you want to go. Rather than looking up an address and then locating the general area on a paper map, and then driving around looking for streets and street numbers – a GPS, after punching in an address or the name of business, or what kind of food or shopping you want, the GPS will tell you where to go and what roads to take and what turns you need to make and how long it will take you to get there. A GPS device takes the stress out of travel in that it personally guides you where you want to go.

In the same way, in the big picture of all of life, wouldn’t it be great if we had a GPS that would personally guide us throughout our journey in life - so we would know where we are and how to get where we would like to go? Well, the truth is – God has given us a GPS to guide us through all of life. He’s given us the Bible, the truth of God, the Word of God, which is the Sword of the Spirit. Like a GPS, God’s word contains all the information we need to know *where we are* in our journey with God - and all the information we need to know *where to travel* in our journey in our walk with God into forever. But that being said, the truth is, more often than not, we find ourselves wandering astray in our journey with God because we take it upon ourselves to disregard the guidance given to us in the Word of God in favor of following the shadow of our own feelings and opinions, which defer to us rather than to God. This happens to us because we live in a day when the truth of the Bible is being systematically attacked and dismissed as words written by mere men; Jesus Christ is now seen as another religious prophet or mythical character; and our Christian faith is viewed as historically antiquated and culturally irrelevant. Our walk with God in our journey through life reflects such things when we put our trust in things that are not of God – like people or things or our ourselves.

In Matthew 6:21 Jesus said: “*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*” Our Lord said this because he knew of the constant temptations we all face as his followers that will distract us and direct us away from the power and joy and the fulfillment that we can have in our relationship with God when we make Him the supreme treasure of our lives. Spoken in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was warning us of the temptations of getting distracted from what truly matters by seeking treasures of the world that we live in, rather treasures of the Kingdom of God. The Bible tells us that the “*heart*” of our lives is the control center of our lives, which means our “*real*” life, our inner life as well as our outer life, is a reflection of the yearnings of our hearts. Proverbs 4:23 says: “*Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.*” And so, we must guard and watch over our hearts so that our hearts would passionately follow hard *after the guidance of God in God’s Word* - by joyfully embracing Jesus Christ the most supreme treasure of our hearts and lives.

On the first Sunday of this month we looked at Psalm 16 which was a prayerful celebration of the joy King David came to know in his relationship with God in the face of all the dangers and all the fears he experienced in life. In that Psalm David told us that because he put God at the very center of his heart and life – he came to know God as his Gracious Protector, Sovereign Presence, Foundation of Righteous Relationships, Beautiful Inheritance, Wonderful Counselor, and Eternal Joy. Our psalm for this morning was also written by King David. Again, like in Psalm 16, we are not real sure of the specific situation or circumstance that caused David to write this prayer - but, like Psalm 16, we know that David knew his share of troubles. He was a veteran of many struggles, battles, and wars. Once again, we don’t know whether David wrote this at a time of painful struggle or difficult trouble - or if he was just reflecting on the general course of his life. In our sermon on Psalm 16, we asked the question: “*What is the greatest treasure of our hearts?*” In our sermon on Psalm 25 today we ask the question: “*How can we stay strong and not wander away from God in our journey with God through life when we face painful struggles and difficult troubles?*” King David tells us how we can in Psalm 25.

The question for today is clearly relevant to all of us. Whether we put our faith in God or ourselves, we will experience painful struggles and difficult troubles *because* we are an imperfect people who live in an imperfect world. Job declared this truth in Job 5:7 when he said: “*Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.*” When fallen people live out their lives together in a fallen world - there will be “*trouble*” and “*sparks.*” We all have good days and bad days, and sometimes the bad days seem to make such a great impression on us, that we lose our way in our journey through life. And while we do not know the specific situations or circumstances David was struggling with, we do read of four issues David was personally struggling with – which are quite often common in our lives also.

1) David’s first struggle was *fear*. Psalm 25:2: “*To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me*”; Psalm 25:19: “*Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me.*” The peace and joy we read of in Psalm 16 is absent here. David’s life and the reputation of his character were in danger. The Word of God tell us if we are truly following Jesus, there will be times we will also experience the same fear. God never promised us freedom from danger when we follow him; but He did promise He would protect us.

2) David was also struggling with *loneliness*. Psalms 25:16: “*Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.*” Loneliness has been called the world’s most common source of human suffering. When fear invades our hearts and lives we feel isolated and alone, which then makes us feel separated from people and from God. But God has promised He will always be with us, even in the face of death. David knew that. That’s why in Psalm 23:4 he prayed: “*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*” Jesus said the same when he declared: “*I am with you always, to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20).

3) We also read David struggled with *guilt*. Psalm 25:7: “*Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions*”; Psalm 25:8: “*Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way*”; Psalm 25:11: “*For your name’s sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great*”; Psalms 25:18: “*Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins.*” In the midst of his fear and loneliness, reminders of sin and guilt flood David’s heart and thoughts. He feels the weight of his sin against him and within him. He cries out: “*The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses*” (Psalms 25:17).

4) Lastly David is also struggling with *confusion*. Psalms 25:4-5: “*Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.*” It is easy to become confused and lose our bearings in the midst of painful struggles and difficult troubles. In an atmosphere of fear and loneliness and guilt it’s hard to know even which way is up. Confusion creates uncertainty and David pleaded that God might him to know the right ways, paths and truths – and David trusted that God would lead him out all the confusion.

“*To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; 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*” (Psalm 25:1-3). David opens his prayer to God by passionately expressing his belief that God would guide him through a difficult time when he was struggling with fear, loneliness, guilt, and confusion. David could pray with confidence for God’s guidance during his time of struggle because he *trusted* God. In his struggles David turned to God; he lifted up his soul to the LORD without shame because he trusted in God’s sovereignty and God’s grace. To “*be put to shame*” here means to be publicly shown to have trusted in someone or something other than God in times of trouble. To be “*wantonly treacherous*” here means to trust in someone or something that is unworthy of that trust.

This again is where the rubber hits the road for those of us who claim Christ. Because of humanity's fall into sin, the default of our fallen nature in times of painful struggles and difficult troubles is most often to *trust in people or things or ourselves rather than to trust in God*. And even the times when we do first put our trust in God, our default tendency is to suggest or manipulate or demand or make deals with God - in order to have the outcome we desire for our troubles to work out according to our plan and purpose. This trusting in ourselves began with the first sin in the Garden, when we bought in to the selfish suggestion of the devil that God was holding out on us. And so we convinced ourselves we knew better than God and we did what God told us not to do. In Genesis 3:6-7 tells us that, "*when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked.*"

Our fallen natural desire to trust in ourselves reveals how *naked* we are when we are not able to be in control. The truth is, we live every moment of our lives trusting in someone or something other than ourselves. We trust the cook at the restaurant will properly cook our food. We trust our employers will pay us. We trust the bank will give our money back to us. We trust every driver who drives a car will not run into us. We trust our families will love us. We trust our friends will not betray us. We trust our hearts will keep beating and our lungs will keep breathing. *Trust* is the glue that holds our lives together. But if we trust people, we get what only people can do. If we trust money, we get only what money can do. If we trust ourselves, we get what only we can do. *But if we trust God, we can only get what God can do – which is everything we need and everything that God can do, which is anything!* We are saved from our sin and eternal death not because of what people or money or we can do - but *because of who God is*. We are saved from our sin and eternal death because Jesus entered our fallen, sinful struggle with fear, loneliness, guilt, and confusion and made it his own – sacrificing it all on a bloody cross. We can trust God through Jesus Christ in any circumstance and every situation we will ever face in life: "*To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust.*" Because King David knew he could trust God, he could pray with confidence for the guidance of God in his time of trouble.

*"Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long"* (Psalms 25:4-5). Here we read of David's desire for God's guidance in his life. And those who do trust God seek His guidance not only do so during times of struggle and trouble, but also for everyday choices and decisions. The terms "*ways*" and "*paths*" here refer to the manner and direction of life. David prayed God would "*teach*" and "*lead*" him in God's "*paths*" and "*ways*." The truth in this is - if we don't trust God to give us His guidance in the decision-making of our everyday lives - we most likely will not seek God's guidance in our struggles and troubles – or if we do seek His guidance, we are less likely to embrace what God tells us to do. David knew God was not just guiding us on certain occasions; he believed God is always *teaching* us the right *paths* and *making* us know His *ways*: "*For you I wait all the day long.*" And David confesses his inability to "*wait*" by his own will and power: "*Make me to know your ways, O LORD!*"

It's at this point that King David humbly acknowledges *God's expectations for us* when we pray for His guidance in our walk with God in our journey through life. We tend to ignore that fact that God does not answer our prayers if our hearts, attitudes and actions are not right with Him. Pastor John Piper says it this way: "The sweetest experience of God's unconditional love is *conditional* on our transformation into the kind of people whose emotions and choices and actions please God." In the midst of painful struggles and difficult troubles, David came to God with his fear and loneliness and guilt and confusion - and prayed that God would guide him on the "*paths*" and "*ways*" of God's mercy, goodness, forgiveness and faithfulness. But David did not presume upon God to do so; *the basis of David's confidence in God was that God would answer his prayer because David confessed the desperate condition of his own heart*. David speaks of the three things God expects from us when we ask Him to guide us on His "*paths*" and "*ways*" of His mercy, goodness, forgiveness and faithfulness.

1) Confession of sin. *“Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions”* (verse 7); *“Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way”* (verse 8); *“For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great”* (verse 11); *“Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins”* (verse 18). While David knew that *sinlessness* is not a requirement to receiving God's guidance, he also understood that unconfessed sin is a barrier to receiving God's blessing. David confesses how sinful he knew his heart was - because he knew God was merciful and good, and would bless David's honest, open confession about the depth of his depravity: *“Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love . . . according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!”*

2) Humility. *“He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way”* (Psalm 25:9). A by-product of honest open confession of sin is *humility*. Acknowledging our desperate need for God reveals how helpless and hopeless we are without Him. A heart that is humble is pleasing to God; David speaks of this in Psalm 51:17: *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”* In James 4:6 we read that, *“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”* When we are humble, we can confidently pray to God for His guidance: *“Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.”* (1 Peter 5:6).

3) Fear of God. *“The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant”* (Psalms 25:14). David describes one who fears *“the LORD”* as one in whom God *“makes known . . . his covenant.”* The *“fear”* spoken of here is the stark reality that without the goodness of promise of God's steadfast love, we would all be condemned to an eternity of torment. God has drawn us out of the deadly shadow of our fallen, sinful nature into the redeeming light of His joyful forgiveness; and *we must never shake off the fear of what could have been.* With a heart filled with humble gratitude, David proclaims the goodness of God's guidance: *“All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies”* (Psalm 25:10).

*“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 his way. All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies”* (Psalm 25:8-10). Amen! But even in this celebratory proclamation of God's goodness, the *“fear”* of God rises up again in David's heart; in the next two verses he prays: *“For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great. Who is the man who fears the LORD? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose”* (Psalms 25:11-12). Here David again humbly acknowledges the tendency for fallen sinners to trust in someone or something other than God. David *fears* dishonouring God's name by not trusting in God as the only reliable guide to the of paths and ways of God's *“steadfast love and faithfulness: “For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great.”* That *“fear”* caused David to know *“the way that he should choose.”*

Choosing to trust God's guidance in our walk with God in the ways and paths of God in our journey through life, is not like any other choosing we do in life. Choosing to trust God is a humble, fear-of-not-choosing-God kind of choosing that empowers us to pray with the rock-solid, joyful assurance that God will sovereignly answer our desperate prayers for the goodness of His guidance when in the midst of the painful struggles and difficult troubles we face in life. God will sovereignly lead and guide us into painful struggles and difficult troubles – *so that* we might wake up to the reality that we have wandered away from Him; *so that* we might then acknowledge the reality of our desperate need for Him; *so that* we might then understand that life is all about God and not about us; *so that* we might then put our trust in God by surrendering our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; *so that* we would then put our trust in God to guide us in our walk with God in the ways and paths of God in our journey through life; *so that* we might glorify God by living for God and enjoying God now and forever.

*“Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.”* God’s Word declares here that sinners like us can trust God to guide us in God’s ways because God is “good.” Sin is neither a qualification nor an obstacle to God’s guidance. But that did not stop David from confessing his sins to God. He does so four times in this psalm – trusting, knowing, believing that God would answer his prayers because David confessed the desperate condition of his own heart. The goodness of God in the guidance of sinners is that sinlessness is not a prerequisite for guidance, nor is it for salvation - because God is magnificently good - in that Jesus died on a cross in our place for our sins and rose from the dead so that we might be forgiven by God and given a new life with God - now and forever.

One of the things my family and I liked to do the first few years we lived in Port Alberni was explore the logging roads on Vancouver Island. We purchased maps that showed us where all the roads were and some of you gave us suggestions of places where we should go and places where we should not go. And so we usually packed a lunch and grabbed our canoe and fishing rods and spent the day seeing if we can get to places we’d never been before. Sometimes we got there and sometimes we didn’t. Sometimes a road was open and sometimes it wasn’t. Sometimes our travel was pretty easy and sometimes it wasn’t. Sometimes we’d come home feeling victorious and sometimes we’d come home feeling defeated. Driving the back roads of Vancouver Island is kind of like life. The roads, paths and ways we follow in life are sometimes easy and open, and sometimes difficult and closed. That’s the way life is also. The truth is, most of the “paths” and “ways” of life on earth are contrary to God – and so we desperately need the GPS of the goodness of God’s guidance to find God’s paths and ways.

The Bible, the truth of God, the Word of God, which is the Sword of the Spirit, gives us the guidance we need to walk God’s paths and God’s ways. Jesus emptied himself of God so that he might come into the world to live with us, live for us and die for us. He was totally and desperately dependent on God while we walked this earth. In John 5:30 Jesus said: *“I can do nothing on my own . . . I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.”* If Jesus looked to God for guidance in *everything* he did on earth, we should too. And that should be not only during times of struggle – but even more so during every moment of every day of our lives. Three months ago I turned 64 years old; and the older I get the more I realize how desperately dependent I am on God. I am finding that the more I trust Him, the more God continues to guide me into His “paths” and His “ways.” I have been wanting and waitin to walk on those paths and those ways for a long time, but I never could get there on my own. David talks a lot about having to “wait” for God’s guidance in Psalm 25. I look forward to the paths and ways God will lead me and Nancy and my family and our church in the days and years ahead. May we pray together for the goodness of God’s guidance with confidence in knowing He can be trusted today and forever. Amen.

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Psalm 23*

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