

I recently read that one of the great gifts of the Psalms is that they are not only the inspired Word of God, but they are the uninspired words we speak to God. Through the Psalms we can learn how God delights in us speaking to him, and learn how we are to speak to him. If I talked to God the way some of the psalm writers talked to him, I would be afraid God might incinerate me.

Kayla Smith wrote in her blog post: “As I’ve grown in my relationship with Jesus, I’ve come to long for the types of conversations David had with God. I’ve come to crave the honesty that he had in his voice when speaking with the One who loves him most. Who would’ve thought that we could ever ask of God, *“Do not let me be put to shame”* (v. 2). *“Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love...”* (v. 6). Like God needs a reminder! *“Forgive my iniquity, though it is great”* (v. 11). *“Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted”* (v. 16).

Nope. Those aren’t the words I learned to say when I talk to God, says Kayla. I learned, “Lord, be with So and So cause she’s a big sinner right now and just miserable. Or, help me get an A on the test I didn’t study for. Oh, and if you can, make that boy like me. And forgive this one sin I committed yesterday. In Jesus name, Amen.” (<https://kaylasmith.net/2017/04/12/psalm-25/>)

I’m so thankful that Psalm 25 has opened my eyes to the freedom God allows us to go to him in moments of great joy and moments of great despair, humbly and honestly approaching his throne. We can do this because a baby born in Bethlehem lived the life we couldn’t live, died the death we deserve to die.

Psalm 25 is a prayer for all seasons. It’s an enlarged version of the most basic prayer that human beings have prayed since the beginning of time: “Help.” **Psalm 25 is a prayer of trust** amid enemies (vv. 2-3). **A prayer for guidance** in the perplexities of life (vv. 4-5). It is **a prayer in celebration of God’s mercy and love** (v. 6). **A prayer made in the consciousness of past sin** (vv. 7 & 11). **A prayer affirming the goodness of the LORD** (v. 8). It is **a prayer awaiting the teaching of God’s way** (vv. 8-9). It is **a prayer of trust in God’s covenant faithfulness** (v. 10).

As we begin this prayer, we first affirm our trust in the LORD. To the Israelites, the lifting of their hands in prayer (1 Timothy 2:8) was a gesture of dependence upon the LORD for the answer to that prayer. It indicated openness to God’s grace, willingness to obey his instructions, and submission to his leadership. Self is vanquished when we put our trust in God (Psalm 25:1-2).

Then we make our plea at the bar of God’s justice (Psalm 25:2-3). The psalmist’s plea not to be *“put to shame”* (Psalm 25:2) was not only personal, but also concerned the whole community of those who “hope” in the LORD (Psalm 25:3). As such, it also concerned the honor of the God in whom we trust (Joshua 7:8-9). The dependence and trust of the psalmist is echoed in this expression in verse 5, *“for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.”*

Next, we seek God’s guidance (Psalm 25:4-5). To obey the LORD, we need to hear his instructions. Dependence upon God should lead to right living. This involves: following his ways, walking in his paths

(Psalm 25:4; Psalm 119:1); being led in his truth, and being *taught* by him (Psalm 25:5). The Father said about the Son in Mark 9:7, *“This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”*

On the positive side, we ask the LORD to remember his *“great mercy and love, for they are from of old”* (Psalm 25:6). For the psalmist, these had been demonstrated in ages past: perhaps referring to the LORD’s revelation to Moses, after the golden calf incident (Exodus 34:6). We, too, can *count our blessings, name them one by one*—acknowledging the mercy, compassion and faithfulness of the LORD (Lamentations 3:22-23). On the negative side, we ask the LORD effectively to FORGET our sins, and to look upon us in mercy as he would look on Christ (verse 7).

That’s what I see here, anyway; a perfect substitution, as the Apostle Paul describes it in 2 Corinthians 5:21: *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”* The psalm writer appeals to the LORD’s mercy and goodness to blot out the sins of his youth and *“according to your love remember me, for you, LORD are good”* (Psalm 25:7). There are hints of Psalm 51 in this verse, don’t you think?

Next, we affirm God’s goodness. It is because of the LORD’s goodness (Psalm 145:9) that we can rely upon him to teach us his way (verse 8). Jesus said, *‘I am the way, the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father except by me’* (John 14:6).

Then, we claim a promise (verse 9). A bit later in the book of Psalms, the writer of Psalm 37 promises that the meek shall inherit the land. In the New Testament, Jesus promises that those who are meek shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5). So, the LORD undertakes to *“guide the humble in what is right and teaches them his way”* (Psalm 25:9).

Finally, we claim God’s covenant and Word (verse 10). This goodness, mercy and truth is based in God’s covenant, and is consistent with his Word (verse 10). God’s covenant is sure, says Psalm 89. The ultimate expression of God’s covenant mercy and love is seen in the Cross of Christ; in sending his only Son because of his love for the world (John 3:16).

Where do all of these different prayers of Psalm 25 lead us, you might be asking? I think they lead us to the “one word prayer” that we have all prayed more times in our lives than perhaps any other prayer: “Help.” As a teenager I read a story in the little book by Corrie ten Boom, titled *The Hiding Place*. Corrie ten Boom was a Dutch watchmaker’s daughter who became a heroine of the Resistance, and a survivor of Hitler’s concentration camps. She was a Christian, but her family was arrested by the Nazis because they risked their lives to help Jews and underground workers escape from the Nazis. In the concentration camp at Ravensbruck where Corrie ten Boom and her sister Betsy were sent, the barracks were terribly overcrowded and flea-infested. They had been able to miraculously smuggle a Bible into the camp, and in that Bible they had read that in all things they were to give thanks, and that God can use anything for good.

Corrie’s sister Betsy decided that this meant thanking God for the **fleas**. That was too much for Corrie, who said she could do no such thing. Betsy insisted, so Corrie gave in and prayed to God, thanking God

even for the **fleas**. Over the next several months a wonderful, but curious, thing happened. They found that the guards never entered their barracks. This meant that the women were not assaulted. It also meant that they were able to do the unthinkable, which was to hold open Bible studies and prayer meetings in the heart of a Nazi concentration camp.

Through this remarkable turn of events, countless numbers of women came to faith in Christ. Only at the end did they discover why the guards had left them alone and would not enter their barracks. It was because of the **fleas**.

When we ask for God's HELP we must remember the promise of Romans 8:28, that God will use all things for good in the lives of those who trust him. In times of trials and troubles, in times of physical and emotional challenges, there can be little doubt that our prayers for God's HELP must be followed with prayers of GRATITUDE, regardless of how we think our prayers have been answered or left unanswered.

When we feel so challenged by the circumstances of life that it's difficult to sincerely thank God for his help—in whatever form that help comes—we ought to remember the story of Corrie and Betsy ten Boom and the **fleas**.

And then, like Corrie and Betsy, we must thank God for his HELP.

“May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope, LORD, is in you” (Psalm 25:21). Amen.