

Walking with the LORD

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[0 : 00] Good morning. It is a privilege to be able to preach with you again today, several weeks ago.

And the theme is indeed walking with the law, the title that Dave has given for our sermon today. And so I want to ask you, how does it go for you? But first we're going to pray. Let's pray together. God, our Father, we do thank you for this day. We thank you for our church community. We thank you for your love to us and we thank you that you want to bless us in every way. And so we come to you with thankfulness and we come to you with open hearts about all the issues that confront us, this church, the peoples of this world, where there's a falling short, where it feels like the roof has fallen in sometimes.

And we pray, O Lord, that you will speak into our lives, whatever the circumstance. In Jesus' name. Amen. So walking with the Lord, how does it go for you?

You're day by day journeying through this life, isn't it? What it means, day by day, week by week, seeking God, experiencing God, your Father with you, instructing, leading, guiding, forming you, and supremely loving you through this life.

[1 : 19] Walking with the Lord. And much of this time in our walk with the Lord through this life, we will wonderfully know God's presence and blessings. That's why we're drawn here today, isn't it? Because we know that to be true.

But what about when we don't? What about when the roof falls in? A tragic death, an awful illness, an enterprise you've given so much of yourself to and is now falling apart.

Struggling to make ends meet, worry about a parent, a son or a daughter. What about in the daily challenges that can beset any of us, all of us? Boredom, doubt, fear, work stress, relationship struggles, sheer loneliness, mental illness.

Just feeling God has gone absent. Or what about on the day when we see the news and it's just too much? We cannot reconcile what we see with a God of love who made this world.

And we may be tempted to wonder about a God of love and may be tempted to despair. Or what do you do when you're convinced that the problem is you? That you have failed?

[2 : 26] That you are not worthy of God? Or you struggle to let go in forgiveness someone who has harmed you? I know through all my years of ministry that all those things happen to Christians.

It's been a privilege to walk with people along all those sort of issues and more. But what do we do with all this raw emotion that we surely must feel as we seek to walk through this life with the Lord? Well, let us thank God that we can go for wisdom to the book of Psalms, the four-week sermon series starting today. The Psalms are, of course, full of praise for the mighty wonder of God, full of confidence in his love and purposes.

But at the same time, the Psalms are brutally honest in the frustrations of this life and apparent disappointments with God. So, we're going to look at Psalm 25, focus for today, see what we can learn from the psalmist for our walk with the Lord.

And if your Bibles are there, page 556 is where you'll find the psalm. And you probably know that of the 150 psalms that are in the Bible, they were written over a period of 1,000 years in the history of Israel.

[3 : 37] From 1400 BC, the time of Moses, to 450 BC, the return from exile. Many of the psalms are ascribed to David, King David. So, they would have been written about 1,000 years BC.

And such is the case with Psalm 25. The psalms became the songs used in the liturgy of the Jewish faith. That surely must be quite a worship experience.

I've never been to a Jewish service, but my guess is it's a bit different to what we do. My guess is that there is room for, yes, passion for God and poetry, love and hope and ecstasy.

But my guess is that if they're using the psalms, there must be room too for fury, disappointment and misery. We can see all of this in Psalm 25. Go first to the end.

Go to verse 16 to 22. Anger, rage, frustration, regret, melancholy, wretchedness. The sheer lament of the psalmist as he calls out to God that he is lonely and afflicted.

[4 : 42] Verse 16. His troubles have multiplied. Verse 17. He is in utter distress. Verse 18. His enemies have increased and they hate him with intense ferocity.

Verse 19. It is clear for the psalmist that the roof has utterly fallen in. It's not clear what are the exact nature of his sufferings. If the psalm was written by King David, there could have been several occasions where the words would have been appropriate.

But it is good that the psalm is not specific. It speaks to all of our human distress and dilemma. The psalmist is trapped in his troubles and cannot untangle himself.

But thankfully, rather than sink into depths of depression, rather than just give up, he knows he's God and to him he can turn.

Fundamentally, the psalmist knows that whatever is going on, God loves him through and through and has made this world for utter goodness and blessing. In verse 1 he writes, To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

[5 : 47] In you I trust, O my God. God, the Lord, Yahweh, the God of the covenant, the promise with the people of Israel. The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God revealed in Exodus 34.

Slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. That is the God that the psalmist knows from the faith of his forebears and from the experience of his life so far.

In spite of whatever is going on, the psalmist trusts in him. He knows, verse 5, that God is his saviour. He calls on God to remember, O Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old, verse 6.

And beseeches him to remember, for you are good, O Lord, verse 7. He holds on, maybe clings on in faith, that all the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his covenant, verse 10.

And so, with this deep sense of the love of God, the psalmist has sustaining hope in God, in his justice. Verse 3, no one who's hope in you will ever be put to shame.

[6 : 57] They will be put to shame who are treacherous without excuse. Verse 5, my hope is in you all day long. Verses 12 to 13, the man that fears the Lord will spend his days in prosperity.

Even in his affliction, the psalmist remains supremely confident that God is at work, that integrity and uprightness, good love will prevail.

He declares, verse 15, my eyes are ever on the Lord, but only he, only he will release my feet from the snare. So the psalmist knows the love of God.

He trusts in hope in God's justice, and the psalmist prays in humility to know God's ways. Verses 4 to 5, show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths, guide me in your truth, and teach me.

Utter confidence in Yahweh, in the Lord. Verse 19, he guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. The Lord will instruct the man that fears respects him.

[8 : 01] He will instruct him in the way chosen for him. Verse 12, the Lord confides in those who fear him. He makes his covenant known to them. Verse 14, in his humility, in his desire to know God and his ways, the psalmist is thoroughly convicted of his sinfulness.

He refers to the sins of my youth, my rebellious ways. He calls on God to forgive his iniquity, though it is great. Verse 11, to take away all my sins.

Verse 18. And again, if these are the words of King David, there could be several occasions that he might be referring to. Not least his adultery with Bathsheba and the effective murder of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah.

But sinfulness is always more general than specific failings. Sin is a falling short in loving God with all that we are and loving our neighbour as ourselves.

Sin is putting ourselves first. Sin is turning the good things that God has given to us into substitutes for him. Sin is always idolatry, where we put other desires and objects before God.

[9 : 14] Sin is always idolatry, where we put other desires and things before God.

When we despair of this world and wonder where God is. When we are in misery, caught up in ourselves. All of this is there in Psalm 25 and throughout the whole body of the Psalms.

What can we learn then for our walk with the Lord? First, be completely honest. Be completely honest with God about who you are, how you're feeling about yourself, your life, the world, God himself.

This may seem like an easy thing to do, an obvious thing. But for all sorts of reasons, we often prefer to try to keep secret who we are and what we are feeling.

A normal human defence mechanism for our psyche. Often not to admit all the negatives that can assail our minds, our souls. We often don't admit how we are struggling.

[10:37] When someone asks you how you are, you're likely to say, oh, I'm fine. When God asks you how you are, you cannot say, I'm fine. He knows you.

He knows you through and through. He knows what you're going through and what you're feeling. We cannot hide all the time from each other who we are. We certainly cannot hide from God.

We've already said at the start of this service in the liturgy, we pray to God from whom those secrets are hidden. God knows us. We cannot pretend with him.

So the psalmist tells us, and maybe there could be, should be a space in our services to do this too. He tells us, whatever you are feeling, give it all to God.

Let him know all that you're thinking and feeling. Yes, of course, thanks and praise and adoration.

But there'll also be times when you can just simply want to rage, cry, weep, shout if you want to.

[11:33] Be honest, the psalmist tells us, when we are struggling. And at the same time, go on trusting God, God of our forebears, the God of our faith.

Trust in the God of love, of justice. The God you have known and what he's done for you in the past. The psalmist writes with amazing conviction.

And this is hundreds of years before the birth of Christ. How much more you and I, when we know the love of Jesus, when we know his life, his resurrection, his ascension, when we know his teaching, how much more we can have that conviction of the God of love.

And of course, all the glory of the New Testament teachings. To know the God of love, be honest with him. To know that God longs for you to have blessing.

I read this the other day, and I've never come across this before in all my years of being a Christian.

Did you know that the Hebrew language has more words for joy than any other language?

[12:36] Did you know that? I didn't. It's a bit like Inuit people with Eskimos having so many words for snow. Snow is their existence, their environment. The Hebrew people were made for joy.

And they had so many different words to try and express the joy that God wanted for them, had for them. Joy is the serious business of God's purposes for our lives, for his creation.

God is love, and in his love, he shares your anguish when all is not well. There can be, should be, a sense of outrage when God's order does not prevail.

So like the psalmist, we are to pray, to cry to God for his goodness to be seen, to prevail. Make this prayer for your own life, for your family, your friends, for all that is bothering us.

I strongly recommend in your walk with the Lord you keep a journal. Not a diary, because then you have to try and fill it in every day. But a journal, you can just write in the dates when you are filling it in. And I just write a load of rubbish in mine, basically.

[13:35] I sit down and think, I'm a bit bored today, Lord. Oh, I'm feeling a bit worried about this and that and the other. And the other positive things, too. Just go into that diary and the people I'm praying about. And if I know your names, I'll try and pray for you at some point in the week, too.

So all of that goes into the journal, the walking with the Lord. Letting God have it all and everything about us. Sharing it with him. And I do know that in my own prayer journal as well, that I should be praying more in outrage at the situations around the world.

Those places where God wants to have blessing. The people of Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, migrants, the mounting devastation around the world, and the climate and ecological catastrophe, poverty, sheer evil in the world.

We can't take it all on our shoulders. But we can, every one of us, be identified with one of those issues, one of those causes. And we can cry out to God in rage, in cry.

And we can give what we can. And we can do what we can to one of those causes. The psalmist does it. He's not just preoccupied with his own troubles. At the end of Psalm 25, he prays for the whole of Israel.

[14:47] Redeem, O Israel, O God, from all their troubles. As we pray, as we cry out for God's justice to be seen, for him to be seen in our lives.

And I would say, as I write in my journal, I see things change over time. The things I was worried about or concerned about, you can look back weeks later, a year later, and God has been at work in those situations.

So pray in all of the issues. Like the psalmist, seek to know God's ways, his wisdom. Continually to seek to turn away from the things we put first before God.

The idolatry that is in all of our lives. Put him first to truly love God with all that we are. So walking with the Lord, our walk with the Lord.

Know God's presence and blessing. Hallelujah. And when you don't, when life goes awry, when there isn't the joy that God intends for you, be like a psalmist.

[15 : 41] Be completely honest with God. Go on trusting in God's love and justice. Be outraged at that gulf between God's purposes and the current reality. And continue to seek God away with sin.

Seek to truly love him with all that you are. Know that Yahweh, our God, has made us for joy. Amen.