

COVID 2019
“Where is Your Hope?”
Psalm 25

The year was 1918. Woodrow Wilson was President of the United States. World War I was coming to a close, and the Spanish Flu was coming to America. Between October of 1918 and February of 1919 there were an estimated 50,000 reported cases of the virus in Washington D.C. and 3,000 people lost their lives. On Friday, October 4 of 1918 the Washington D.C. paper The Evening Starr tells us that the Commissioners of that city took drastic measures to curb the spread of the virus. They closed all church gatherings in the district.

And now, just over 100 years later, here we are. Lake Wylie Baptist Church. It's a Sunday morning, yet our building is empty. The children's wing isn't filled with teachers and students. Our Equipping Hour classes aren't meeting, and I'm preaching to an empty room.

None of this is what we planned. It's not how we thought we'd spend 2020. Yet, here we are, and because we know that God is the sovereign ruler and architect of all things we know that this moment in time was planned for us before we had even heard the word coronavirus. So, what do we do? **How do we take this moment captive for Christ and the glory of God?**

While many of our neighbors are running around looking for bottled water and toilet paper, **there is** a more fundamental human need- it's a need that was baked into our humanity by God himself. It's not shelter or food. It's not water. It's not even air. This need is even more basic

than all of those. What could be more basic than shelter and water? What could be more essential than air? Hope. Because we aren't just physical beings, we don't just have physical needs, and hope is a deeply spiritual need that we have today.

If you have your Bible with you, begin turning to Psalm 25. While there are many passages in the Bible that command us to hope in the Lord, **the Psalms are particularly helpful because they don't just tell us to hope in the Lord—they actually show us how to do it.** That's because the Psalms are the recorded prayers and songs of believers in the Old Testament. Let's begin in Psalm 25:1...

¹ To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

*² O my God, in you I trust;
let me not be put to shame;*

let not my enemies exult over me.

*³ Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;
they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.*

*⁴ Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths.*

*⁵ Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all the day long.*

*⁶ Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.*

*⁷ Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!*

⁸ Good and upright is the Lord;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
⁹ He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.
¹⁰ All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and
faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

¹¹ For your name's sake, O Lord,
pardon my guilt, for it is great.
¹² Who is the man who fears the Lord?
Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.
¹³ His soul shall abide in well-being,
and his offspring shall inherit the land.
¹⁴ The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him,
and he makes known to them his covenant.
¹⁵ My eyes are ever toward the Lord,
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

¹⁶ Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.
¹⁷ The troubles of my heart are enlarged;
bring me out of my distresses.
¹⁸ Consider my affliction and my trouble,
and forgive all my sins.

¹⁹ Consider how many are my foes,
and with what violent hatred they hate me.
²⁰ Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me!
Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.
²¹ May integrity and uprightness preserve me,
for I wait for you.

²² Redeem Israel, O God,

out of all his troubles.

As we read through the Psalm we can see that the author, who happens to be King David, is nearly overwhelmed. He has a different worry in every direction.

First, his reputation is at stake. He says, “Let me not be put to shame.” Externally, he’s surrounded by enemies, and internally, he’s confronted by his own sin. And, to make matters worse, he doesn’t know what to do about any of it.

Now, you may not be in danger of losing your reputation. And, you may not have enemies plotting your downfall. But I can imagine that most of us in the last week have found something to worry about.

Perhaps you’ve been worried about this virus that’s spreading. Or, maybe you’re worried about the effects of this virus on the economy—and your retirement plan by extension. Some of you have just been worried about how to keep your kids entertained while we’re all on lock-down. **I know that we’ve all gained a new understanding of loneliness**—mostly because loneliness has been forced on us for our own good. And I know for a fact that all of us have experienced an incredible amount of confusion in the last week.

Friends, we find ourselves, today, asking questions that would have seemed silly only a few days ago. **Is it safe to go to the grocery store? What about my neighbors?** How close should I get to them? Pastors have been forced to cancel worship services even though none of their congregation is sick.

I want you to know that all of this is compatible with normal Christian life.

Psalm 25 shows us that a life devoted to God often goes hand-in-hand with confusion and suffering. And the way to respond to worry, to confusion, to guilt is to set your hope on God. And that's what David does. He goes to God in prayer. Instead of letting his circumstances unravel him—he sets his hope on God. And he does this in three ways:

- Hope Waits on God
- Hope Seeks God's Guidance
- Hope Depends on God's Mercy

And as we study the passage, I pray that you will set your hope on this God if you haven't yet, and that you who have trusted in Christ will set your hope even more firmly upon him.

First, let's see that:

1. HOPE WAITS ON GOD (v. 1-3; 19-22)

Many of the Psalms that ask for God's help and mercy end with a note of celebration. They anticipate God's deliverance and begin to celebrate even before the Psalm is finished, even though the circumstances of suffering have not yet shifted; but, Psalm 25 is different. **This Psalm begins and ends with waiting. There is no celebration. There's no outburst of praise.**

Verse 1 says, *To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.*

² O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame;

and verse 20 closes out the Psalm by saying:

²⁰ Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me!

Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.

²¹ May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you.

Now, if you payed attention, you see that David ends his prayer with almost the exact words he began. What does that mean? **It means he finished his prayer with as much a sense of waiting and longing and need as when he began.**

This Psalm leaves us with a sense of hunger to see God's hand of deliverance. We're left feeling a bit unfulfilled. **And that's intentional.** One of the reasons the Psalms are so powerful in our life is because they touch on every single human emotion. Joy, sadness, sorrow, anger, fear, and even anticipation.

In his commentary on this passage, Derek Kidner says this: "to wait is to accept God's timing, and therefore his wisdom." Church, to set your hope in God means you are accepting God's timing. You are surrendering yourself to his wisdom.

You know, our own sinful hearts love to be in control. We love to make decisions without input and especially without boundaries. One of the reasons so many have found the past week not just frustrating, but unnerving is because we've been put in a situation where very few things are in our control. So many decisions have been made for us.

Friend, that's exactly what God did to David. He put him

in a situation where David could no longer rely on his own strength, his own wisdom, his own talents. David came to the end of himself. And until you do that—until you come to the end of yourself you will never understand what a hope you have in God. David says, *¹To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.² O my God, in you I trust;* In other words, I'm done trying to control everything. I'm done acting as if I have all the answers. I'm out. I'm tapping out. I'm caving in on myself—so Lord I come to you. I trust in you.

Years ago, my favorite song writer Rich Mullins was trying to figure out what God was up to in his life. He was battling confusion and fear and he wrote this line: **I can't see how you're leading me, unless you've led me here; to where I'm lost enough to let myself be led.**

Our lives have been so easy in the 21st century, and I can't help but think that one of God's purposes in this outbreak of a virus is to bring us to a point of humility; to forge patience in the fire of uncertainty.

Friend—this fire of uncertainty that I'm speaking of—not knowing how long the virus will last, how our economy will look in a month—that fire of uncertainty is producing one of two qualities right now in your life. Either it is producing fear, or it is producing faith. There is no in-between. You are either hoping in yourself, or the government, or your money—or you are patiently looking to the God of heaven and trusting in his sovereignty on power. Which is it producing in your life?

David shows us that hoping in the Lord means accepting God's timing and waiting on him, but we also see this:

2. HOPE SEEKS GOD'S GUIDANCE (v.4-5; 8-10)

As the Psalm continues David sets his hope on the Lord by making requests. He begins to ask for God's help. Specifically, he's asking for God's guidance. Look at verse 4:

⁴Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.

⁵Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.

and again in verse 12:

¹²Who is the man who fears the Lord? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.

¹³His soul shall abide in well-being, and his offspring shall inherit the land.

¹⁴The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.

¹⁵My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

Here's what David is saying: Lord I know that I won't make it if you don't guide me—so speak to me. He says, “make me to know **your ways**,” “teach me **your paths**,” lead me **in truth**,” instruct me **in the way I should choose**,” “make **your covenant** known to me!”

To set your hope on the Lord means that you not only accept his timing—it means you seek his guidance. You look to his Word to guide you. You want to learn more about Him, his law, his decrees, his purposes. **How do you**

do that? How do you seek God's guidance? Well, David gives us 4 aspects to seeking. And if you want God's guidance, all four of these have to be present in your life.

He says you must seek God's wisdom with **persistence, penitence, obedience, and fear**. You need all four of these to really profit from God's Word. First:

Persistence

Notice in verse 5 David says, ***5 Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.***

David is so committed to receiving God's guidance that he's listening all day long. Not just for a moment. Not at random. His attention isn't divided. This isn't a half-hearted token request. No, David's hope is so firmly set on the Lord that his mind is continually resting on God's law, waiting on God to guide him.

Friend it isn't enough to seek God's wisdom sporadically. You have to seek him diligently and persistently. This is exactly what God told the people of Israel when they were in captivity in Jeremiah 29:12

12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. 13 You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.

Are you seeking God with your whole heart? Are you treasuring his Word in your heart? If not, then you haven't really set your hope on him. If you haven't then it's no wonder you're so anxious. Read God's Word persistently.

Second:

Penitence

Penitence is what Jesus preached about when he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." In other words, when you seek God's guidance—you need to seek it with a poverty of spirit—knowing that you are a guilty sinner. Verse 8 says:

8 Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

Who is it that receives instruction? Sinners; those who know and admit they are sinners. You have to go to the Word of God with a knowledge of your own sin. You need a healthy fear of your own sinful nature—your own sinful weaknesses.

In Luke 18 Jesus told us of two men who sought God in prayer. God rejected the prayer of one and received the prayer of the other. Listen to what Jesus said:

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other.

The only way to get guidance is to come to God with penitence—poverty of spirit. The only way to get ahold of God is to first admit that you have no claim on him.

Third:

Obedience

Look down at verse 8:

⁹ He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

You say, “I didn’t see the word ‘obedience’ in there. When David says God teaches the humble here’s what he’s saying: God teaches the teachable. He teaches those who are ready to obey. They’re humble.

I can remember the first ministry job I ever had. I was a student minister in Raleigh and I’ll never forget my pastor telling me, “Jonathan, you’ll always have a place here as long as you are teachable.” He knew that an unteachable spirit is a huge liability. And it’s the same with seeking God’s wisdom.

James 1:5 tells us:

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-

minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Friends, God doesn’t give wisdom just to those who ask. He only gives it to those who ask in faith. That means you only receive the wisdom you’re willing to follow. If you are saying, “God, you tell me what you think and then I’ll decide whether or not it works for me,” then you’ll never really be instructed by God.

Finally:

Fear

Verse 12 says:

¹² Who is the man who fears the Lord? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.

Again in verse 14:

¹⁴ The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.

What does it mean to fear something? Fear is fundamentally about awareness and control. Here’s what I mean: when you’re in the woods camping and you see a 700 lb Grizzly Bear lumbering toward you two things are happening simultaneously: you’re constantly aware of the bear’s presence. You can count every tooth and claw, you trace his every movement. You never take your eye off him. And at the same time, everything the grizzly does controls everything you do. In that moment—the bear is firmly in control. He’s in the driver’s seat.

Now, listen, to fear the Lord means to be constantly aware of God's presence, his greatness, his reality, his holiness—his perfect purity that would consume any sinner in his presence. And, if you're God's child it means you are constantly aware of his compassion and mercy to you. You never take your eyes off of it. You're **so focused** on who God is and what he's done that he's in complete control of everything you do. He's in the driver's seat.

When you seek God's guidance you have to come to his word with an awareness of God's greatness, eyes fixed on his holiness, his mercy to such a degree that you are then controlled by his Word.

Friend, hope waits for God. Hope seeks his guidance, and finally:

3. HOPE DEPENDS ON GOD'S MERCY (v.6-7; 16-18)

Throughout the Psalm, we see David's hope culminate in a request for God's mercy and pardon. He knows he's guilty.

First, we see that he still remembers the sins of his youth.

Verse 6 says:

6 Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

7 Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!

How many of us still daily wrestle with the regret of

what we did 10 or 20 or 50 years ago? How many of us wish we could take back words we said in immaturity? **How many of us live daily in the fear that someone who knew us back then will bring up our past failures?**

And he knows the magnitude of his sin. Verse 11:

11 For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great.

His sinful choices have rippled out consequences to his spouse, his children and even the entire nation. Friend, have you ever realized how destructive one word can be? How one sinful choice can lead to 10 others. Have you felt the heaviness of your own sin?

And where has his sin led him? To happiness? No. Only to brokenness and sorrow. Verse 17 says:

17 The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses.

18 Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins.

An old pastor named R. G. Lee once said that sin only pays in counterfeit money.

All throughout this Psalm David is recounting all the ways he has sinned, all the effects of his sin, all of the destruction that's left in the path of his sin. In fact, he's so forthright about his sin that we almost want to stop him. Slow down David. I mean, be honest, but not too honest. You start sharing too much and God might change his mind.

And that's the very fear that sits in the back of our minds isn't it—the fear that God may change how he feels about us. Maybe there are some sins he won't forgive. Maybe his patience will run out for us. And, yet, David turns around and in effect says, “Yes Lord, this is how bad it really is. I'm being bluntly honest about my sin... now:

*according to your steadfast love remember me,
for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!*

And it's here that David has found the key to hoping in the Lord. His love is unconditional, unchanging, unending to David. You say, “How can that be? David didn't deserve God's love! He wasn't worthy of God's goodness? So, how can God show him love and acceptance? How can he show me love and acceptance though I am unworthy of it?”

Friend, God can love and accept you though you don't deserve it, because at the cross God rejected and forsook Jesus though he didn't deserve it.

Friend, at the cross, Jesus had no sin of his own to confess. He had sought God's guidance and followed it to the letter. He waited patiently on the Lord—but instead of lifting Jesus up out of the pit—the Father let him sink. Jesus was given as a substitute. He died bearing our sin and the wrath of God- though he was sinless.

To set your hope on God means you depend on his grace. Is that you? Have you confessed your own guilt and said with David,

*according to your steadfast love remember me,
for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!
¹¹ For your name's sake, O Lord,
pardon my guilt, for it is great.*

Do it today. Don't wait. Do it even now. Friend, if you have more questions about what it means to be a Christian—to truly depend on God's grace—send me a message online. Leave a comment. Ask another Christian to help you learn more.

Church—what will give you the courage you need to face the uncertain days ahead? It's a hope in the Lord that waits on him daily, that seeks his guidance, and depends on his grace.

Let us Pray