

# Sitting in the Gap Study Guide – December 2, 2018

## Psalm 25:1-10

(Click on scripture above to link directly to each passage in the *NRSV* on biblegateway.com.)

### Suggested Study / Prep

1. Read the passage(s) in several different translations and/or paraphrases (e.g. *NRSV* and *The Message*)
2. Read the provided commentary(s) below
3. Visit and explore some of the additional resources links (and/or explore your own commentaries, resources, etc)
4. Reflect on the provided questions
5. Generate your own questions and “wonderings”

### Commentary on Psalm 25:1-10 (From *Homiletics*; “God Talks”, November 29, 2015)

Psalm 25 is one of several alphabetical acrostic Psalms (including 119), where each succeeding verse or set of verses characteristically begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Other acrostic biblical poetry is found in Proverbs 31:10-31 and Lamentations chapters 1–4. Psalm 25 combines elements of several types of psalms with expressions which feature lament, penitence/forgiveness, wisdom and Torah-observance. There are significant parallels to such Psalms as 86, 103 and 143 (which, like Psalm 25, are attributed to David). Psalm 143:8 reads: "Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust. Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul." Nearly every word touches on key themes of Psalm 25, e.g., 25:1: "To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul." "Soul" is *nephesh*, used also in Genesis 2:7, "[T]hen the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being [*nephesh*]."

So, in verse 1, David poetically says to God, in so many words: "I present my life, my very self, to you in prayer." David can do that because, as he says in 25:2a, "O my God, in you I trust." David also expresses his trust in God by saying that he is one who *waits* for God. "Wait for" (vv. 3, 5, 21) translates the Hebrew *qawah*. Unlike "wait" in modern English, *qawah* has the sense of eagerly awaiting/confidently expecting/looking for/longing for/hoping for. See Isaiah 40:31a: "[T]hose who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength."

Because he trustingly places his confident hope in God, David anticipates that God will not let him be shamed when he faces his enemies (unspecified, as in many psalms). Words for shame appear in verses 2, 3 and 20. In verse 2b David begs God not to let him be "put to shame" (*NRSV* and *NIV*; *NET* has "humiliated"; *NLT* and *NAB* have "disgraced"), so that his enemies (v. 2c) will not exult over him (*NRSV/Tanakh*)/triumphantly rejoice over him (*NET*) when he is defeated. The Hebrew verb *bosh* (pronounced "bohsh") means public humiliation or disgrace more than an internal feeling. Verse 3 parallels verse 2: Those who confidently wait (*qawah* -- see above) for the Lord will not face disgrace; rather it is those who are wantonly and without cause treacherously deceitful who will be shamed. The treachery is against David or against God or both. See also verses 15-21, which express anew David's

confident prayer that God will protect him and/or deliver/save him from inner and outer distressing straits and from the enemies who regard him with violent hatred. "Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted" (v. 16 in both NRSV and NIV). Verse 22 generalizes David's plea to include all of God's people, Israel, when they face troubles.

David trusted God enough to *invite* him to teach him how to follow his ways. His prayer in verse 4a, "Make me know your ways" [*derek*], is in Hebrew poetic parallelism to verse 5a's "Lead me [or "Guide me" -- *darak*] in your truth" [*emet* -- truth, faithfulness, dependability]. The noun *derek* (road or way) appears four times in Psalm 25 (vv. 4, 8, 9, 12); it frequently is used metaphorically to mean *way of life*. See such passages as Psalm 86:11; Exodus 33:13; 1 Kings 2:3; Isaiah 55:7-9; and Proverbs 22:6: "Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray." *D-r-k's* verbal form, *darak* ("lead"/"guide") appears twice in Psalm 25, in verses 5a (see just above) and 9b. Jesus told his closest associates, "I am the way, and the truth and the life" (John 14:6a). Early followers of Jesus were commonly known as those who belonged to "the Way" (Acts 9:2; 18:25-26; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22).

As part of David's asking God to make known to him the way he wants him to live, he uses the verb *yarah* (to teach or instruct) in verses 8 and 12. *Yarah* is etymologically related to *torah* (God's instruction or law). David has become aware that he does not always follow God's instructions, so he asks God to forgive his youthful sins, as well as his transgressions/rebellious behavior, and his great guilt (vv. 6-7, 11, 18). This forgiveness is on the basis of God's *steadfast love* (*hesed* -- with a hard h; see vv. 6, 7, 10). *Hesed* means covenant loyalty, kindness and mercy, as well as steadfast love. It is used synonymously in verse 6 with *rahamim* (tender mercy/compassion), which is etymologically related to a Hebrew word for womb. God's mercy and steadfast love "are old as time" (v. 6 -- *Tanakh*). David fervently yearns for God to forgive him rather than to remember his sins. See other such forgiveness-assuring passages as Psalms 86:5, 103 (all); Micah 7:19; and Isaiah 43:25, which reads: "I, I [the doubling makes this emphatic] am He who blots out your transgressions [rebellious behaviors] for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins." God's goodness and uprightness/being fair in judgment (vv. 7, 8) leads him to be persistent in instructing humble/afflicted sinners (vv. 8-9). These are people who have *missed God's way*, yet who have come to realize the necessity of trusting dependence upon God, in order to *find God's way* and thereby God's good, providential blessings.

David's God, who is our God, shows special care and friendship for those who keep his covenant and his decrees (see vv. 10, 14: "friendship" is *sod*, pronounced "sode," which means being in an intimate circle of confidants). To "fear" the Lord (vv. 12, 14) is to obey him and to hold him in high honor. Covenant, *berit* (pronounced BuhREET), can mean a treaty, agreement or arrangement. In the theological setting of Psalm 25, "covenant" means a mutual relationship, initiated and given by God for his people's benefit, but one in which the stipulations of the covenant are to be adhered to by his people. Abraham is called God's friend (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23). Jesus calls us his friends (John 15:12-15) if we do what he instructs/commands/commissions us to do (the NT Greek verb is *εντελλομαι*). Jesus caringly sits in a close circle with us, confidently sharing his trust in God, as well as teaching us his wise insights and expectations. He offers us his ongoing guidance, forgiveness and the sometimes gentle, but always effective, power of God's Spirit. Because God kept faith with David, David learned that he could keep faith with God. God keeps faith with us, too. As Jesus' disciples (*μαθητης* -- those who have apprenticed ourselves to Jesus), will we continue to walk and work with Jesus, to learn from him how to be like him and to put into practice what he teaches us?

## Additional Resources

- [The Text this Week](#) – a huge archive of commentaries, blogs, sermons, etc. Note – this site collects resources related to ALL of the lectionary texts for a given week...not all will relate to the passage(s) being studied, but many will. You will have to sift!
- Check out other commentaries available for these texts (and others!) at [WorkingPreacher.org](#).

## **Reflection Questions on Psalm 25:1-10:**

- 1.** On this first Sunday of Advent, this Psalm highlights a spirit of waiting (v. 3 and v. 5). How do the cyclical seasons of our liturgical calendar relate to this spirit? Does the fact that we observe Advent each and every year remind and renew? Or does it actually diminish our need to “wait for the Lord?”
- 2.** For what do we actually wait when we wait for the Lord? For an external force to intervene in our circumstances? For an inner sense of well-being and “peace”? For eternal security and salvation after death? Something else?
- 3.** As noted in the commentary above, Psalm 25 is an acrostic poem in its original Hebrew, a fact generally lost in translation into the English language. Does the knowledge that this Psalm is indisputably poetry change the way you receive it? Consider creating your own version of this Psalm – an English acrostic prayer for “guidance and deliverance” using the original as a model. What metaphors, images, and feelings would you include?

**What questions do you have?**

**What do you “wonder” about when reading these passages?**