

Sitting in the Gap Study Guide – July 14, 2019

[Psalm 25:1-10](#) & [Luke 10:25-37](#)

(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 *rahmim* (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?

Commentary on Luke 10:25-37 (From *Homiletics*; "The Kindness Contagion", July 14, 2019)

The "Parable of the Good Samaritan" is found only in Luke's gospel, like many other parables in Luke. Although the confrontation with a lawyer has parallels with similar conversations with opponents in Matthew 22:34-40 and Mark 12:28-34, the parable that follows here in Luke is unique. Immediately preceding this passage, Jesus had been instructing the disciples "privately" (v. 23). Thus, the introduction of the lawyer in verse 25 comes rather unexpectedly and raises some questions about the extent to which the conversation between Jesus and his disciples was ever really "private."

Although the identification of the man as a lawyer may initially not bode well given that the only other mention of lawyers at this point in Luke's gospel has been in 7:30 where lawyers are described as rejecting God's purpose, this lawyer is a rather ambivalent character. On the one hand, he is described as intending to "test" Jesus, an action which could have some malevolent undertones. On the other hand, however, his initial address of Jesus as "Teacher" displays an element of respect, and in the conversation that ensues, he does not prove to be an overly hostile interlocutor. The conversation initiated by the lawyer in verse 25 evolves into a developed repartee between Jesus and the lawyer that lasts through verse 29. Although the lawyer's initial question places Jesus in the position of defendant, Jesus eludes this role by posing a question to the lawyer instead. The conversation rapidly turns into a parable when, in verse 29, the lawyer asks Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" Rather than pose another question as he did at first, Jesus answers the lawyer's inquiry through the use of a story. Like many of the parables, this parable is meant to do more than recount a pleasant, moral tale. Rather, it is meant to incite action. Indeed, the frequency of

the word “do” within the frame of the parable (vv. 25, 28, 37) suggests that the parable’s purpose is to lead the lawyer, if not the gospel’s audience, to take action.

While, in one sense, Jesus’ answer to the lawyer’s question concerning the identity of his neighbor takes the form of an entire parable, in another sense, Jesus provides an answer at the very beginning of his tale: “a certain man.” That the identity of the beleaguered traveler is not provided may suggest that the most basic answer to the lawyer’s question is “anyone.” In any case, though, Jesus’ parable is only just beginning. The man is described as a traveler on a stretch of terrain between Jerusalem and Jericho which would provide ample hideouts for highway brigands such as the ones described in verse 30. Thus, it comes as only a slight surprise when the lone traveler is assaulted on his way.

With this foundation laid, the parable continues as Jesus describes a series of three other travelers: a priest (v. 31), a Levite (v. 32) and a Samaritan (v. 33). In each case, a similar pattern of events unfolds as the newcomer to the scene “comes” and “sees.” That the priest and Levite pass the man by is perhaps not surprising. The early audiences of this parable may have likely assumed that a priest on his way from Jerusalem was returning home after offering the customary two weeks of service in the Jerusalem temple. Such service would have required exact ritual purification and cleanliness, so it would not be difficult to imagine that the traveling priest is ritually clean and undefiled. Upon seeing the traveler who was left half dead (v. 30), the priest may have assumed, not illogically, that the man had, indeed, already died. If this was the case, the priest would risk a full week of ritual impurity if he were to come in contact with the corpse (cf. Numbers 19:11-13). Thus, it would seem both understandable and prudent for the priest to avoid such contamination.

While the risks for the Levite may not have been as severe in terms of his concerns to remain undefiled, he, too, would take a risk by coming to the aid of the wounded traveler. By stopping along the road, he would make himself vulnerable to attack by the same robbers who afflicted the dying traveler. Thus, it is hardly inconceivable that this man, too, would fail to stop and offer aid.

The pattern of “coming,” “seeing” and “passing by on the other side” which was established by the priest and Levite appears to be set to continue with the arrival of the Samaritan on the scene. The Samaritan, too, “comes” and “sees.” However, at this point at the end of verse 33 where the audience would be accustomed by now to expect that he, too, would pass by, the story takes a unique twist as the Samaritan is “moved with pity.” Unlike the other two passersby, the Samaritan is not described in terms of religious identity but in terms of ethnicity. Indeed, it is intriguing that “priest,” “Levite” and “Samaritan” are the only identifying markers that Jesus uses to label the key characters in his parable.

In any case, the Samaritan proves himself up to the task of doing precisely what his precursors did not: providing care for the wounded man. Like his act of bandaging wounds, the Samaritan’s deed of pouring oil and wine on the injuries may be understood as a compassionate one insofar as both liquids were considered to have medicinal and healing properties. Intriguingly, however, the Samaritan’s act of bringing the wounded traveler to an inn is a slightly more ambiguous deed insofar as inns were notorious for catering to questionable clientele who could become dangerous. Thus, leaving the wounded traveler to fend for himself in a rather seedy environment may raise some questions about the extent to which this final act may be conceived of as a compassionate one.

Nonetheless, Jesus ends his parable and returns in verse 36 to his questioning of the lawyer by asking which of the parable’s main characters acted as a neighbor to the wounded traveler. Unlike Jesus, who had identified the three main characters in the parable by religious and ethnic markers, the lawyer in turn identifies the neighbor only by his action: showing mercy. With this identification, the lawyer demonstrates that he has correctly understood the parable, and thus, Jesus ends their conversation with instructions that echo the action-oriented language seen in the initial framing of the parable: go and do.

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. Though we don't see it in our English translations, Psalm 25 is an alphabet acrostic poem in Hebrew, with each line beginning with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. And as noted by Joel LeMon, *workingpreacher.org* (July 14, 2019): "...when we attend to the structure of Psalm 25 we can start to comprehend its message. In short, the psalm claims that God shows us the way. God provides the way out of danger, the way to live in harmony with others, the way to order our lives. And this psalm shows us a way to pray." Why not try it out yourself? Consider composing an acrostic poem about your relationship with God using your own alphabet, praying through the process...
2. Where do you/we, like the Psalmist need to put you/our trust in God? What does it look like in your/our daily living? What are the challenges or stumbling blocks to this kind of trust? What are ways that we can nurture and foster a more trusting faith / relationship with God?
3. Again from Joel LeMon: "*What can we learn about God from Psalm 25? The psalmist articulates a set of characteristics about God. These characteristics are revealed explicitly through his direct claims about the divine character (verse 8-10) and implicitly through his requests for God's action (verses 1-7). And what can we learn about the psalmist, and by extension, about ourselves?*"

Reflection Questions on Luke 10:25-37:

1. Given the familiarity most of us have with the parable of the "Good Samaritan," it is easy to lose its initial and intended "shock value" and fall into well-trodden platitudes and conventional interpretations. One way around these obstacles to encountering the story anew is to retell the story in a contemporary setting, with characters that resonate with our own context. Or alternatively, to retell the story in a different idiom (think Veggie Tales or superheroes or sports, etc). Why not try it and see what new insights arise?
2. "Who is my neighbor?" seems to be a genuine question for both the lawyer in this story and also for us. Are neighbors those in physical proximity? Are neighbors those in social proximity? Are neighbors those in our particular group/community? How can we know how to care for neighbors properly?
3. Where do you see yourself in this story? Are you the lawyer, wondering what is necessary to live a good and faithful life? One of those "passing by"? The Samaritan helper? The one left half dead by the side of the road? The innkeeper, just a bystander doing your job? Someone listening in to the conversation and hears the call to "go and do likewise?"

What questions do you have?

What do you "wonder" about when reading these passages?