

## **Psalm Twenty-Five.**

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.  
O my God, in you I trust;  
do not let me be put to shame;  
do not let my enemies exult over me.  
Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;  
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.  
Make me to know your ways, O LORD;  
teach me your paths.  
Lead me in your truth, and teach me,  
for you are the God of my salvation;  
for you I wait all day long.  
Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love,  
for they have been from of old.  
Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;  
according to your steadfast love remember me,  
for your goodness' sake, O LORD!  
Good and upright is the LORD;  
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.  
He leads the humble in what is right,  
and teaches the humble his way.  
All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,  
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.  
For your name's sake, O LORD,  
pardon my guilt, for it is great.  
Who are they that fear the LORD?  
He will teach them the way that they should choose.  
They will abide in prosperity,  
and their children shall possess the land.  
The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him,  
and he makes his covenant known to them.  
My eyes are ever toward the LORD,  
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.  
Turn to me and be gracious to me,  
for I am lonely and afflicted.  
Relieve the troubles of my heart,  
and bring me out of my distress.  
Consider my affliction and my trouble,  
and forgive all my sins.  
Consider how many are my foes,  
and with what violent hatred they hate me.  
O guard my life, and deliver me;  
do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.  
May integrity and uprightness preserve me,  
for I wait for you.  
Redeem Israel, O God,  
out of all its troubles.

Have you ever had the experience in which someone presented you with a petition, and asked if you would add your signature to the list? Perhaps they came up to you with a clipboard in a hallway, and pinned you down, or tried to stop you as you walked by on a street corner. Or maybe they sent it to you by means of a mass email, or posted it for friends and family to see online.

I imagine that most of you will have, at one point or another. Because it is not uncommon, the function of a petition will be familiar to us: if one can document evidence that there is enough support or lack of support for a thing, and deliver that to the right place, it might sway the hand of the people who hold the power or resources to change the situation.

***Psalm Twenty-Five is a petitionary psalm, in something of that spirit. By my count (and I may be off, here), there are twenty-three requests listed. At least one for every verse, if not more.***

Some of these might be categorized as “petitions against,” in which God is asked to move things away from the negative direction that has already unfolded, or seems to be presently unfolding. *Do not let my enemies exalt over me* (v.2) Others, we might see as “petitions for,” in which God is asked to bring about something positive that does not yet exist, or might yet exist more fully in the world and in the world of the one praying. *Lead me in truth, and teach me* (v.5). Often, the two types are paired together and brought to God at once, as positive-negative couplets. *Guard my life and deliver me, do not let me be put to shame* (v.20)

My wife recently re-posted a petition on social media. Signatures are being gathered in support of building a splash pad at a park around the corner from our house. We have a vested interest in this, as we don’t have a backyard and rely on use of public, outdoor spaces for our children. And we have an interest, in wanting to advocate on behalf of other families whom we know in our neighborhood.

We talked about it together, when she shared the link. And I have to admit, I mentioned how I struggled to think that it would accomplish change. We live in a low-income quarter of the city, with a property tax base to match, and suspect that projects like these often tend to get shuffled to the bottom of the pile, priority-wise. “Will this really do anything?” I asked.

***My own cynicism and doubts aside, I suspect that a lot of us experience similar struggles, when it comes to petitionary prayer, as we see it modeled in this psalm.***

“Will this really do anything?” we ask. We wonder if anyone is actually reviewing the appeals that we attempt to collect and deliver (Are the messages deleted? The letters shredded? Do they ever make it any further than the office assistant?). Or, we question how essential our requests are, in God’s view, when others express more desperate needs (Are improvements to the park really the most important thing to be asking for, right now?).

The psalm-writer lists their pleas with confidence. They can do this because of an assurance of who God is, as the One who listens and responds. They come with trust, humility, and an openness to being corrected and instructed, but with a conviction, no less, that spiritual petitioning works. Because they understand that the LORD is “for them” (v.10, 14).

***And so perhaps the dozens of requests that we find in Psalm Twenty-Five serve as reminders that, rather than asking too much of God, we are maybe more likely to err by asking too little. - NS***