

Psalm 25:1-10 - “Regret and Reconciliation”¹

Before the lesson – Make copies of the Coventry Litany of Reconciliation, to be used in the Transformational Exercise.

Fellowship question: (Use *one* of these to break the ice, begin some discussion, and lead into the study):

What is the last menu order you regret having made?

What is one thing you will regret not doing if you don’t do it between now and your death?

Information

[Write these quotes² on a notecard each and ask three different class members to read one each.]

- Speak when you are angry - and you'll make the best speech you'll ever regret. - Educator and writer Laurence Peter
- At the end of your life, you will never regret not having passed one more test, not winning one more verdict, or not closing one more deal. You will regret time not spent with a husband, a friend, a child, or a parent. - Former first lady Barbara Bush
- I'd rather regret the things I've done than regret the things I haven't done. - Comedienne Lucille Ball

Today’s scripture deals with regret. It seems to be from an older person’s perspective, looking back, reflecting – and regretting. What do we do with our regrets? This psalm gives us some hints.

Psalm 25 is another of the eight acrostic psalms – each sentence beginning with a consecutively different letter of the alphabet.

“The psalm’s acrostic scheme would have made the poem easier for Hebrew speakers to memorize, but the artificial system works against the poet’s ability to give the psalm clear structure. As a result, it wanders about from one theme to another and then back again.”³

Still, this commentator finds three themes in the psalm: “Hear me”, “Guide me,” and “Forgive me.”

¹ This lesson is copyrighted by Dr. Rick Jordan, Great Bible Teachers, Inc, 2023. More lessons may be found at greatbibleteachers.com.

² Braineyquote.com

³ Tony Cartledge, “Healthy Regret,” *Nurturing Faith*, February 22, 2015.

- Have a class member read Psalm 25:1-3

What is it that the psalmist regrets? That is a trick question! There is no elaboration on his wrongdoing.

Now, this is not a trick question: How does a psalm about unnamed regrets serve us better than one that specifies a particular sin or wrongdoing? (It is broad enough to cover us all; all of us have done wrong that we regret, so it applies to everyone's spiritual life, etc.)

What do you see in these first three verses that might inform us about approaching God with our regrets? (The psalmist believes that God hears him, in spite of his wrongdoing; the psalmist asks for mercy and for protection, etc.)

What do you see in these first three verses about how our wrongdoing can be used by others? (They may use our wrongdoing as fodder to shame us or embarrass us; they may use a point of our weakness to overtake us; they may see themselves – and promote themselves – as superior to us, etc.)

The psalmist categorizes himself as “one who waits for you.” What do you think he is waiting for? (A sign that he is forgiven? A feeling that God cares? A sign of trust – I know God will act, so I will wait patiently. Etc.)

- Have a class member read Psalm 25:4-5.

These verses ask for God's guidance. What are the different ways your translations state these prayers for guidance?

Listen to this passage from Proverbs. What does it have to say to us about God's guidance?

- Have a class member read Proverbs 3:5-7.

What does that passage have to say to us about God's guidance?

When Jesus came, many referred to him as a teacher (rabbi, which translates to “great teacher”.) Yet, some were not willing to hear his lessons. Indeed, they challenged his authority as a teacher of God. So, he told a story – which was one way he taught people.

- Have a class member read Matthew 21:23-32.

Which son would have regretted his behavior? How does this story from Jesus relate to the psalmist's wrongdoing?

This psalm challenges us to be humble and receptive and willing to change. Professor Nancy Koester says, “Learning nice little moral lessons or memorizing factoids about God is not the

point. Instead, God invites us to be changed by divine mercy and love. The work of Psalm 25 is to express receptivity, or even to make us receptive.”⁴

How has reflection on a regret brought you closer to God or other people?

“The point is, if we don’t lay important decisions before God and remain open to whatever impressions God may lay upon our hearts or minds, we increase the chance of making a wrong turn.”⁵

Can anyone share a story with us of when you did lay an important decision before God? What happened?

In Psalm 25:5, we again have the theme of waiting for God. We live in a society that is addicted to instant gratification. Is this idea of waiting for God still relevant to our society? Why or why not?

- Have a class member read Psalm 25:6-7.

As he looks back over his life, the poet has regrets. But he does not want the worst days of his life to define his relationship with God. He asks for mercy. He trusts in God’s “steadfast love”. This is the Hebrew word “hesed” (HEH-sed) It is a word that represents God’s merciful love, as demonstrated by the covenant God keeps with Israel in spite of their rebellion. It is grace. If God is gracious and merciful, God will forgive the worst days of a person’s life.

The psalmist invites God’s companionship.

“The essence of the road of the righteous is this: it is a road too difficult to walk without the companionship and friendship of God. The psalmist, troubled from without and within, has stopped for a moment in the way; he knows he cannot turn back, but scarcely knows how to continue. And so he prays that God would show him the road and make him walk in it.”⁶

The psalmist asks God to remember who God is (merciful, loving) but to forget who the psalmist was. Then, the psalmist wants God to remember once again. What does he want God to remember this time? (“According to your steadfast love remember *me*”) How do you explain this cycle of remember/forget/remember?

Up until this point in the psalm, this song has been a prayer. Now, it becomes a testimony.

- Have a class member read Psalm 25:8-10.

⁴ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2173

⁵ Cartledge.

⁶ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1983), 222.

Transformational Exercise

[Distribute the litany.]

Coventry Cathedral in London has a very long, 1000-year history. According to the Cathedral's website:

“On the night of 14 November 1940, the city of Coventry was devastated by bombs dropped by the Luftwaffe. The Cathedral burned with the city, having been hit by several incendiary devices.

“The decision to rebuild the cathedral was taken the morning after its destruction. Rebuilding would not be an act of defiance, but rather a sign of faith, trust and hope for the future of the world. It was the vision of the Provost at the time, Richard Howard, which led the people of Coventry away from feelings of bitterness and hatred. This has led to the cathedral's Ministry of Peace and Reconciliation, which has provided spiritual and practical support, in areas of conflict throughout the world.

“Following the bombing of the medieval Cathedral in 1940, Provost Howard had the words 'Father Forgive' inscribed on the wall behind the Altar of the ruined building. These words are used as the response in the Coventry Litany of Reconciliation, which is prayed in the new Cathedral every weekday at noon.”⁷

Let us read together this Litany of Reconciliation, noting the sins it lists, as well as the prayer for the forgiveness of our sins:

[Teacher reads light print, students the bold print. Pause after each of the students' responses to allow for a few seconds of reflection between prayer requests.]

⁷ <http://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/about-us/our-history.php>

Coventry Cathedral's Litany of Reconciliation

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.[Pause]

The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class,

Father Forgive.

The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own,

Father Forgive.

The greed which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste the earth,

Father Forgive.

Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others,

Father Forgive.

Our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned, the homeless, the refugee,

Father Forgive.

The lust which dishonors the bodies of men, women, and children,

Father Forgive.

The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God,

Father Forgive.

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Amen.