

An Average Person And An Awesome God

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 0 0] Well, we are going to turn back together to Psalm 25, so if you just open your Bible, or take up your phone, or whatever you're looking at, we can turn together.

We're going to look at the whole Psalm, but I'd like to read again at verse 14, as we start together. Psalm 25 at verse 14, the friendship of the Lord is for those who fear Him, and He makes known to them His covenant.

I mentioned in the morning that on Friday, God willing, we'll be going away for about 10 days holiday, and we're very, very excited because we're going skiing, and skiing is my absolute favorite thing to do.

I know that it's probably very unfair to say this, especially for those of you who like skiing and aren't going. Well, I am going, so I'm excited, and it's going to be wonderful.

One of the things I love about skiing is when you are on a mountain top, and the sky is blue, and you can just see for miles and miles and miles, and there's just this magnificent display of snow and mountains, hills, and valleys.

[1 : 3 1] It is utterly stunning, and for me, one of the things I love about being able to go there is that I don't think there's any part of the world that declares God's glory as powerful as that.

Just the snow is so white, the mountains are so vast, the view is incredible, and God's glory is just breathtaking. Now, whether or not you've done that before, I want you just to imagine that you're there.

I want you to imagine that you're on the mountain top, and there's just this incredible view in front of you. As you're standing there, I want you to imagine that you're taking a selfie.

You're taking up your phone, and you're holding it up, and you're taking a photo, so it's got you in it, and it's got this beautiful landscape behind you, a selfie on a mountain top in the Alps.

If you were to then look at that photo, what would you see? You would see a stunning view of breathtaking beauty and majesty, and you would see yourself because you're in the photo as well.

[2 : 4 3] The reason I want you to think of that is because that is exactly what it is like to read the Psalms. The Psalms are just incredible because they take us to the very mountain tops of theology.

They are the place where we see so clearly the glory and beauty of God, but at the very same time, when we look at the Psalms, we see ourselves.

That's true of every Psalm, but it's definitely true of Psalm 25. You can read through this Psalm, and you see some of the most amazing descriptions of God, and yet at the same time, there's some incredibly powerful and personal descriptions of ourselves.

That balance of God's glory and our frailty that we have in this Psalm is reflected in my title for this evening, which is, A Very Average Person and a Very Awesome God.

Because that's what you see in this Psalm, a very average person and a very awesome God. I want to just unpack those two headings a wee bit tonight.

[4 : 03] First of all, a very average person. One of the reasons why we love the Psalms so much is because they are so honest. These poems express the joys, the sorrows, the struggles of life.

That's one of the reasons why the Bible is so brilliant, because it's not giving us kind of mystical, wishful thinking nonsense. The Bible is giving us truth.

It's speaking to us in a way that is so honest and so real. Psalm 25 is a brilliant example of that, because it's written in the context of trouble.

But if you look more closely, you can see that there's actually two layers or two categories, if you like, of trouble that David is experiencing as he's writing these words.

You can see the first layer is external opposition. You see that at the beginning and at the end of the Psalms. If you look at verse 2, it speaks about enemies.

[5 : 06] If you look at the end of the Psalm, verse 19, it talks about his foes. So at the start of the Psalm, end of the Psalm, you have this description of external opposition, people who are out to get David.

David experienced that many times in his life. He lived around 1000 BC. He was king of Israel. He was their greatest Old Testament king. But throughout his public life as king, and even before he became king, he faced several opponents.

So before he took to the throne, the existing king Saul, despite being initially friendly towards David, ended up with this kind of deranged hatred of David.

And he was insanely jealous of him, frequently trying to kill him. After David became king, he had to fight off frequent attacks and threats from foreign enemies.

But it wasn't just foreign enemies that were opposing him. Even within his own nation, there were people who conspired against him. Even his own son, Absalom, led a failed rebellion against him.

[6 : 14] So David was no stranger to having external opposition. And although we don't have the same national status as David, although we live in a very different time, and although thankfully we don't have the same kind of military threats around us that David had, yet it is true that in our spiritual lives we face opposition.

In our spiritual life, it's unquestionably true that the devil wants our destruction. And not only that, on a day to day level, the work of the kingdom of evil and the effect of sin brings all sorts of difficult experiences into our lives in terms of how we have to interact with other people.

So even thinking back over last week or thinking ahead to the week that lies ahead, I'm sure all of us have experienced times when other people have been jealous of us or difficult to work with or cruel or undermining or cold.

And that can happen at work. It can happen with our families. It can even happen at school, in the playground, people might say things that are harsh or might do things that hurt us.

So although we might not sort of say, like David says, you know, I've got enemies who want to exalt over me, or many are my foes in the way that David expressed it, at the same time I think every one of us can think of times when we have been hurt or treated badly by others.

[7 : 43] And all of it is just different manifestations of the same thing, the fact that sin has ruined the togetherness that's supposed to characterize humanity.

So external opposition is real. And anyone who experiences that, you can be sure that you are a very average person.

We all have to deal with difficulties external to us as we go through life. But if you look at the Sam more closely, you can see that in between that external opposition that's mentioned at the start and mentioned at the end, you also find another layer of trouble, a layer of trouble that runs like a thread right through the Sam.

And instead of talking about external threats, it's a description of inward anguish and distress. Now no doubt the two were related, but the distinction is important.

And you see in David through the Sam, this internal distress and turmoil that he was facing. And in these middle verses, running from verse two right through towards the end of the Sam, you see so many experiences that average people like you and me have to deal with.

[9 : 12] And I just want to pick out five or six of them. If you look at verses two and three, you see a fear of shame. You see David speaking about that.

He doesn't want to be put to shame verse two again in verse three. And so David's fear of his opponents wasn't just in terms of the physical threat that they posed.

It was also a fear that he was going to be humiliated. And that fear of shame was a massive part of Old Testament culture. And to be honest, it was a massive part of Western culture until probably only about a hundred years ago.

If David failed as king, then it would bring huge embarrassment in that he was not able to fulfill his role, that he was not able to do what everybody expected him to do.

And those, you know, and in the midst of that failure, others would sneer over him, gloat. And we might not be kings, but we feel exactly the same threat.

[10 : 14] And we don't tend to use the term shame as much in our culture today. But we tend to use phrases like a fear of letting people down, a fear of what other people might say or what other people might think.

And it's all basically the same thing. If we muck up at work, if we can't cope with the pressures that we face, if we can't put on this front of kind of just constant perfectness where we've got this just unflinching togetherness, then we feel that will be an embarrassment.

We don't want any of our weaknesses or failures to be exposed. We're crippled by a fear of shame. Verses four and five speak of uncertainty.

It's interesting. David speaks in these verses of asking God to show him his ways, make known to me your ways, teach me your ways, lead me in your paths. Now, that's a beautiful prayer for guidance.

But of course, the background to a prayer for guidance is somebody who doesn't know what to do and someone who needs God to lead him. That's why he is appealing for God to guide him.

[11 : 25] And when he says, I wait for you all day long at the end of verse five, I don't quite know how to take that because you could say, well, you know, maybe he's patiently willing to wait all day.

And it's like, well, David, you know, you're patiently waiting and that's good. Or maybe it's saying that he's waited all day and nothing's happened. And he said, I'm waiting for you, Lord, I need you to show me which way to go.

Either way, what's clear is that he's facing uncertainty. He needs God to guide him, but he has to keep waiting. So often we are the same.

And that's especially true when we maybe have a big decision to make or when we're facing big changes in our lives. We think, what should I do?

Whether that's decisions about jobs or where to work, where to live, what church to go to, who to marry, all these things.

[12 : 24] These big questions come before us and we're like, Lord, I don't know what to do. And throughout life, we face these kind of choices.

And sometimes we hit dead ends. Sometimes we're confident that God's leading us down a certain path and then it all seems to go wrong. It's a common experience in the Christian life where we face situations and we think, Lord, I don't know what to do.

And I really need you to guide me. And sometimes the answer to that prayer doesn't come straight away. David faced uncertainty. So often we do as well.

In verses 67, the words get us to think about regret. Look at that, you're fixed. We're thinking about regret.

So David is looking back on his life. Can I do that? I was going to show you a photo of skiing to make you all jealous. Look at that. You want to go now, don't you? That, by the way, is Annie when she was tiny.

[13 : 26] So let me go right through to where I am. I am here. Regret 67. There we go. By the way, well done, tech team. Thank you very much. Excellent.

Regret. Here, David's looking back on his life. And here, look at those words. He's saying, don't remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions. And so, you know, looking back and he cringes at some of the things that he is aware of.

That's again, a very, very common experience for very average people. I am sure every single one of us can look back at the past week or the past month or the past year and think, oh, man, I wish I hadn't done that.

I wish I hadn't said that. Regret is a common experience for us all. Regret is a common experience for us all.

And so, I am sure every single one of us can look back at the past week or the past year and think, oh, man, I wish I hadn't done that.

[14 : 30] Regret is a common experience for us all. And so, I am sure every single one of us can look back at the past week or the past year and think, oh, man, I wish I hadn't done that.

But yet, at the same time here, he knows that he's not innocent either. And there's probably many things that he's done that he shouldn't have done or many things that he's failed to do that he should have.

He's aware that he's part of the problem as well. And often, that's an even worse feeling. You know, if you feel oppressed by somebody else, that's a horrible thing to experience.

In those situations, you know that, well, they're the ones who have been unreasonable and they're the ones who have been unfair. And you can take comfort from the fact that you know you're being unfairly treated when that sometimes happens.

But when it's something that you've done, and you think, oh, I wish I hadn't, that I think is even worse when that guilt eats you up on the inside.

[15 : 35] And that can be an incredibly hard thing to experience. Oppression hurts us, but we feel comforted when we know that we've done the right thing.

But guilt crushes us because we feel like we deserve everything that we get. The fifth thing we see is isolation.

Turn to me and be gracious to me because I'm lonely and afflicted. In the midst of all these struggles, David feels alone. And so often, that's what it's like, isn't it?

And you know, you can be surrounded by people, but still feel alone. You can be consumed with fears and anxieties, and you feel like you can't tell anybody. And you can be crushed by shame, but the last thing you ever want is for other people to know that you're not alone.

And in the midst of those kind of feelings, you look at everybody else and you think, they are so much better than I am. And they don't have these kind of doubts, and they don't make these kind of mistakes, and they're in a much better place than me.

[16 : 47] And that makes us feel like we can't talk about it. And all that does is just intensify the isolation. And then number six is anxiety.

The troubles of my heart are enlarged. Bring me out of my distresses. Or 17. That language is really fascinating, isn't it?

The troubles of my heart are enlarged. And so often, that's how it could be. All of our hearts have troubles. We all face difficulties in life, but there are times when those troubles are just enlarged.

Amplified. Bigger. Now for me, that is usually at night. And that's something you see in the Psalms very often, that it's at night that things bother you, and you feel anxious and worried.

And you know, that's one of the things that can happen. You can be lying in the comfiest bed, in the coziest room, safe, warm and secure, and yet you're plagued by your thoughts and your fear.

[17 : 57] David's heart was full of anxiety, and he was preying with God to bring him out of his distresses. So there's six things that the Psalm describes.

Six things that are common experiences of humanity. Fear of shame, uncertainty, regret, guilt, isolation, anxiety. As we've been saying, the Psalms are so honest and so real.

And the point I want us to recognize is that if you feel any or all of these things tonight, or if you felt any or all of these things at certain points in your life and in your journey, as a believer, even if you're just at the very start of that journey, whatever stage you're at, it does not mean that you are abnormal, or that you're the odd one out, or that you are a freak.

If you feel like this, it means you are actually very, very, very average. Now, I don't mean average in the sense of playing these things down to say, oh, they're not that bad.

That's not what I mean. Although these are average experiences, that does not mean for a second that they're easy ones. What I'm trying to say is that this is what we're all like.

[19 : 31] And this is what we all experience. Looking at David in the Psalm, you see an external layer of trouble.

But alongside that, there's an internal layer of anguish and turmoil. And that external internal mix is part of the reason why diagnosing our struggles is always complicated.

It's why quick fixes very rarely work. It's why recovery can often take a long, long time. But the Bible helps us to understand what's going on.

And the Bible explains all of these in a very helpful way. And the Bible keeps pushing us back to the fact that the reality of all of these things in our lives is a consequence of sin.

And theologians use a term to describe that. And it's a very, very helpful term for us to either learn or to remind ourselves of. The term that's used is the term total depravity.

[20 : 28] That's the term that's used to describe the effect that sin has had. Now, it's an easy term to misunderstand and at first glance it can sound like a very harsh term. Because you might think, well, that's implying that everybody is utterly wicked.

But that is not what it means. It's not saying that everybody is utterly awful. What it's saying is that every part of life has been affected by sin.

And so the total part of it is total in scope, not total in terms of degree, total in terms of scope. Every part of creation, every human being, every part of our humanity has been affected by sin.

In other words, there's brokenness inside us and all around us. And it shows itself in our hostility towards God and towards others and in terms of all the anguish and trouble that we experience ourselves.

What I want to say though is that I think that this term total depravity is actually incredibly helpful. And I hope that you can see that it's helpful for two reasons. One, because it's reminding us that the totality of the scope of sin helps us to see that struggling is something that we're all going to experience.

[21 : 47] The struggling Christian, the doubting Christian, the wobbling Christian, the unsure Christian, the Christian who is mocked up is a normal Christian.

We all face this kind of thing. The person in Psalm 25 is a very average person. But the second reason why this word, this phrase is very helpful is because it's reminding us that in every area of our lives there is the potential for things to be rubbish.

In every area of our lives there's the potential for things to be rubbish. Now, you might think, well, that's really depressing to us, but I don't mean in a depressing way. It's actually a helpful thing to us to recognise because so often we think that our lives are meant to be perfect.

That if you can get the grades that you need in school, then everything will be perfect. If you can get the degree that you're looking for or the job you're looking for, then everything will be perfect. If you can find the guy or the girl who's the person of your dreams, then everything will be perfect.

If you get the house, the money, the pension, the whatever, everything will be perfect. You think we need to have this, everything has to be perfect. And there's this kind of fairy tale Hollywood myth idea that you have to kind of decide what you want to do in life.

[23 : 04] Everything needs to work out and then that doesn't happen. And you feel like a failure because everything hasn't been perfect.

Or it does happen and you do get the job and the house and the life and everything and you discover that you're still actually not happy. And you think, well, what am I supposed to do now?

And this term is telling us that if we find that life doesn't work out perfectly the way we want it to do, if we find that something that we thought would make us happy hasn't quite made us happy or if we find that the thing we aim for has actually slipped through our fingers and if we feel that things haven't worked out, then you are not a hopeless failure.

You're actually just normal. Because the potential for rubbishness in any area of life has got to be expected.

And that's why it's important to remember that the other side of the coin for total depravity is total vulnerability.

[24 : 16] That's what we face. We're vulnerable to the effect of sin in every part of our lives. And we can't separate the two things.

The two things go hand in hand. Like David, we can find ourselves exposed to all sorts of things that hurt us. Like David, we are part of the problem ourselves.

We are sinners and we make mistakes. And so it's helpful and important for us to remember this. That all these kind of things are to be expected and you're not failing if you experience them.

The biblical doctrine of sin, the reality of total depravity, reminds us that this is what the path of life is going to bring.

This is the experience of every Christian. If you feel all of that, or even some of it, you are very, very average.

[25 : 23] Crucial question is, what do we do about it? How do we respond? Well, I think the response that Sam 25 is pointing us towards, and the response that I want us to see tonight, is that we need to recognize that we have a very awesome God.

If you imagine you're back on top of that mountain, the view is stunning. Everywhere you turn, there is something incredible to see. And that is definitely what this Sam is like in terms of showing us what God is really like.

If you go through this Sam, you see there's this constant reminder of the struggles and vulnerabilities of humanity. But at the same time, there's also this constant reminder of just how amazing God is.

You can see that in some of the words that are used in the Sam to describe God's qualities and His actions. It talks about God's truth, salvation, mercy, steadfast love, goodness, good and upright, instructs, leads, teaches, faithfulness, friendship, covenant.

These are all brilliant words. And there's loads we could say, I've already run out of time, so I just want to highlight four key things that the Sam tells us about God.

[26 : 40] It tells us in verse 8 that God is good and upright. Now, that's the kind of phrase that you can just whist through very quickly. Good and upright is the Lord, but it's telling us two amazing things, two utterly crucial things.

It's telling us that God is good. Now, you might think, well, I know that. I know you know that, but it's so good to think about it.

So sometimes we'll say, you know, God is good when something good happens in our lives. So we're going to, we're trying to do something that goes well. You know, even this renovation, the money we needed has come in. People have helped us and we think God is good because He's helped us with all that we've sought to do.

And that's absolutely true. When something good happens in our lives, it's great to return thanks to God to say God is good. But the phrase good and upright is the Lord is saying more than that.

It's not just saying God is good when things go well. It is saying that God is good at every single moment and in every single thing He does.

[27 : 48] God is good infinitely and eternally. So if you imagine trying to draw God, I know you can't draw God, but imagine that circle is just representing God.

And what I want you to think of is the fact that every square millimeter of that circle, in every square millimeter of that circle, God is good.

In other words, there's never, ever, ever any badness in God. If you imagine that circle is a billion times bigger, at every microscopic spot in that circle, God is good.

So think of stuff that's bad, deceit, manipulation, exploitation, betrayal, discrimination, injustice, selfishness, cruelty, everything that we see in the world around us, everything that we experience when others are cruel to us.

There is not one speck of that in God. In fact, it's impossible for God to be any of those things. God is the very definition of goodness itself.

[28 : 57] He is the source of all other goodness. It is a metaphysical impossibility for God to ever be bad. He is good.

But alongside that goodness, He is also upright. That basically means that He is dead straight, never crooked, never twisted, never does anything other than that which is right and true and fair.

In every square millimeter of God, He is upright. And so that means that no matter how deep you go into the nature of character of God, no matter how far into God you examine, you will never, ever find anything in Him that is crooked or deceitful or double-minded or anything like that.

And you look at the world around us today, and especially you look at people who lead in the western world today.

And you think, I'm going to search every square millimeter of that person, are you going to find that they're good and upright? Today you don't even go down to a millimeter.

[30 : 13] It's like you can see a mile off that they're far from good and upright. God is not like that. We're also taught that God teaches the truth.

And this is again just an amazing emphasis in the Psalm. God doesn't confine that goodness and uprightness to Himself. He reveals it to us.

And He does that in order to teach us, to guide us, to show us the way that we are to go. And that's just an amazing reminder of God's interactions with us, the fact that He's not keeping us to Himself.

It's not like, you know, I'm good, but keep away. It's like, no, I'm good, and I will teach you. I'll reveal myself to you. What we need to recognize is that God's teaching of truth to us is actually what holds our whole understanding of reality together.

And so God has told us that there is order in the universe. And it's on the basis of that truth that humanity has gone to make all sorts of incredible discoveries in science and technology.

[31 : 14] God tells us that morality is real. And that's why we need law and order. That's why we need ethical frameworks by which we live our lives. And that's why we know that things like murder and theft and exploitation are always wrong.

God's told us that community is essential. That's why every human needs family, friendship and company. God has told us that death is an enemy.

And that's why it causes so much pain, suffering and fear. But the most fundamental truth that God has told us, the most important one, is that He loves you.

And that takes us to the third thing, that the Psalm teaches us about God, that he's full of mercy, faithfulness and steadfast love. These three terms speak of God's compassion of his commitment and of his unfailing, unstoppable love.

And so go back in your mind to that mountain. You're standing on that mountain top, you're looking out over the beautiful scenery in front of you. And at one level, that is teaching you about just the vastness and the beauty of God's love.

[32 : 32] But there's more than that. Now imagine that a storm has come in and the wind has picked up, heavy clouds have come down, snow is falling, you cannot see where you're going.

And you're freezing, you're completely isolated, and you know that you are in huge danger.

And then imagine one of these big Swiss Saint Bernard dogs bounding up that hill to reach you. And I love that image of just that big dog running through the snow, leading a group of rescuers up to reach you.

That dog bounds through the blizzard, that dog can smell you in the distance. And so it powers up the hill and it reaches you. And you're able to wrap your arms around that big fluffy dog so that you're warm and safe and protected in order so that the others can come and get you.

That dog bounding up the hill, never stopping, always looking, always running, always searching until it eventually finds you. That is what steadfast love is like.

[33 : 52] That is what God's steadfast love is like. And then the fourth thing we have here is the description of how God provides salvation, security and friendship.

And it's way quicker than I wanted to. You can go back to the psalm and dig into all of these things yourself. You think of the God who is utterly good.

You think of him in his uprightness and his truth. What does he want to do with you? He wants to save you. He wants to hold you secure.

He wants you as his friend forever. And this is where we see that all the awesomeness of God meets all the needs of a very average person.

So if you feel anxious, God is saying, I will hold you and look after you. If you feel isolated, God says, I am your friend and I'm going nowhere.

[34 : 58] If you feel guilty, God says, I can wash away all your sins and pardon you. If you feel full of regret, God is saying, I have more than enough mercy for you.

If you feel uncertain, God says, I'll teach you and guide you. If you feel crippled by a fear of shame or if you feel useless or if you feel you've made loads of mistakes or if you feel like your life's a mess, God says, all of that actually doesn't matter because I love you and I will never stop.

Psalms 25 is telling us that God is a very awesome God. But I want to just conclude with a final point that's so crucial to remember.

When we think about these categories, a very awesome God and a very average person, we can quickly feel that, well, we're kind of very much down here and he's very much up there.

And you can put it in a wee picture there on the screen where the mess of our experience, the mistakes that we make, the struggles that we have feels like such a long way from the goodness and glory and power of God. And that's true at one level where nowhere near God in terms of his level.

[36 : 22] He alone is God. He alone is unique in his holiness, power and glory. And we are just below what feels like a line of rubbishness where we're just miles from what we want to be.

We're weak, we're struggling, we're doubting, things haven't turned out the way we hoped they would. And we just feel stuck way down here below this line of rubbishness.

And because of that, we can often feel that the only way that we can have a relationship with God is if we have some kind of awesome experience ourselves.

So that, you know, he is awesome. If something awesome happens to us, then things will be better. And so we feel like we need to reach God either through some amazing experience or some dramatic improvement in our lives or some wonderful answer to prayer or for us to be like spiritually on fire or to get into this kind of category of Christians that seem to be doing everything so well.

And that, you know, if we could just be a little bit awesome ourselves, then we could get up to the level that we need to be, then we could have that kind of relationship with God that we long for.

[37 : 44] And so often that's how we think and we look at other people who seem to have had awesome experiences and we think, well, they're the ones that God really likes. And we think the more awesome our experience might be or the more awesome we are, the closer to God we will become.

So often we think, yes, I know that God is awesome and I know that I am rubbish. If just something awesome would happen to me, then I could have a relationship with God.

Then I could be a Christian. Then I could know that everything was fine. All of that is total nonsense.

Because in terms of our relationship with God, the only awesome one is Him. And the amazing truth is that His awesomeness is not so great that it's way above us that we might just reach one day.

His awesomeness is so great that He comes right down to meter.

[39 : 03] And that is where we see something so amazing. We think that amazing experiences or amazing qualities will propel us up towards the awesomeness of God.

The truth is, the awesomeness of God will reach us even when we feel utterly rubbish.

And that's what this Psalm is telling us. The awesome God described in this incredible Psalm is meeting the needs of the most frail, most vulnerable, most average, average person.

That's what the Psalm is telling us. That's what the whole Bible is telling us. That's what Jesus' mission is telling us. Because Jesus has not come to say, you know, see if you can reach me?

Come on, see if you can reach me. No, the message of the Gospel is God saying, I am coming to get you. I am coming to meet you. And that is exactly why Jesus came.

[40 : 19] And if you ever think that God cannot reach you where you are, then you still have not grasped how utterly awesome He actually is. The Gospel reveals the incredible awesomeness of God.

And it offers that awesomeness to you no matter how average you think you are. In the Gospel we have a very awesome God for very average people.

And that is one of the many reasons why following Jesus is just blooming brilliantly. Amen.