

A Very Average Person & A Very Awesome God

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Preacher: Thomas Davis

[0:00] I'd like us to turn back together to Psalm 25. We're going to look at the whole of this Psalm today, but we can read again these verses, these words in verse 14.

The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear Him and He makes known to them His covenant. For many of us across the country over the past few days we've had some snow. I don't know about you but I absolutely love snow and one of my favorite things to do is to go skiing. Now this year of course ski trips are off but normally for me and maybe for many of you one of the absolute highlights of the year is to go skiing and there's lots of cool things about skiing but I think one of the most amazing things about it is when you take a chairlift right to the top of a mountain and you step outside under a cloudless sky and all around you the view is utterly amazing. I've got a photo here just to try and give you the idea if you've never been to the mountains before that gives you just a tiny glimpse as to what it might be like and for those of you who have gone skiing I'm sure you can I'm sure you're well aware that even the best photo doesn't actually do it justice. For me personally snow-covered mountains like that is probably the place where the majesty of God's creation is seen most clearly. None of us will be doing that this winter but I want you to imagine that you are standing at the top of a mountain.

In front of you is majestic vastness and breathtaking beauty. So imagine that you're there but I want you to also imagine that you're taking a selfie so you've got your phone you're holding it out and you're taking a picture. In that selfie what you can see on the screen is stunning beauty and majesty but you can also see yourself and the reason that I want you to think of that is because that's exactly what it's like to read the Psalms. In the book of Psalms we are taken to the very mountain tops where we see the extraordinary 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 it's definitely true of Psalm 25 and in this Psalm as we read through it we see a very average person and a very awesome God.

[3:12] And these are two headings today. So a very average person one of the many reasons why we love the Psalms is because they're so honest. These poems express the joys and sorrows the highs and lows of life which is brilliant because it's reminding us that the Bible is not giving us mystical fairytale wishy-washy nonsense. It's speaking to us in a way that is honest and real.

Psalm 25 is a great example of that and it's actually written in the context of trouble but if we look more closely we'll see that there's actually two layers of trouble that David experienced as he wrote these words. The first layer is external opposition and you see that at the beginning and at the end of the Psalm verse 2 talks about enemies verse 19 at the end talks about many foes.

And David experienced that many times in his life. David lived about a thousand years before Jesus around a thousand BC and he was king of Israel in fact he was their greatest king but throughout his public life he faced several opponents.

So before he took the throne the incumbent king Saul despite initially being friendly towards David ended up with an almost insane jealousy and hatred of him and then after David became king he faced numerous threats both from foreign enemies but also from within his own nation even from within his own family and tragically his son Absalom led a failed rebellion against him. David was no stranger to having other people oppose him and you and I don't really have the same national status as David and thankfully we don't have an opponent seeking to kill us in the way that he often did yet in spiritual terms it is unquestionably true that the devil wants our destruction and even on a day-to-day level I'm sure that all of us have experienced times when people external to us other people are jealous of us or cruel towards us or difficult or undermining or cold that might be at work in your family maybe even at school so although few of us I think would say that we have numerous enemies and foes in the language that we have in Psalm 25 yet at the same time

I'm sure that every single one of us can think of times when we've been hurt or badly teetered by others. It's all different manifestations of the same thing the fact that sin has ruined the peace and togetherness that should characterize humanity. External opposition is very real so anyone who experiences it is actually a very average person but in between the mentions of external opposition at the beginning and at the end of the Psalm there's another layer of trouble this layer runs right through the Psalm and instead of referring to external threats it's a description of inward anguish and distress and in these middle verses we see so many of the experiences that average people like you and me experience and have to deal with. I'm just gonna pick out six there's probably more things that we could look at but I'm gonna briefly look at six examples. First the fear of shame. David mentions that in verses 2 and 3. He was afraid that that his opponents weren't just going to cause him physical harm he was also afraid of the humiliation that he would face. Now the fear of shame was a huge part of Old

[7 : 32] Testament culture and indeed I think it was I think it's been part of almost every culture until around a hundred years ago in the West. If David failed as king it would bring a huge embarrassment because he wouldn't have fulfilled his role others would have been able to gloat and sneer over him and we might not be kings and we might not use the word shame in that sense but we definitely feel the same threat. We just tend to use the phrase letting people down or letting ourselves down but it's basically the same thing we think if we muck up at work if we can't cope with the pressure that we face if we can't display kind of constant unflinching togetherness if we if we show our weakness to others we feel that we'll be an embarrassment to ourselves and to those around us. Two we see uncertainty here David gives a beautiful prayer asking for guidance but of course the background to a prayer like that is someone who doesn't know what to do so he's appealing to God to teach him and to lead him and when he says I wait for you all the day long that might mean that he's patiently willing to wait all day if he needs to or it might mean that he has been waiting all day and nothing's happened either way he's facing uncertainty he needs God's guidance but he has to keep waiting and so often we're the same and that's especially true in our current circumstances just now but throughout life we face choices sometimes we hit dead end sometimes we can be really confident going down a path thinking yeah this is right and then it doesn't work out the way that we expect it's a common experience in the Christian life to think Lord I don't have a clue what to do I really need you to guide me and often the answer to that prayer doesn't necessarily come straight away. The third thing we see is regret David looks back on his life especially his youth as you can see there in verse 7 and he asks for mercy and that's another regular experience for very average people

I'm sure that all of us can look back on the past week or the past year or just our lives in general and think oh I wish I hadn't done that.

Fourth we see guilt alongside the regret David is conscious of his guilt and as he says in this verse he's aware that his guilt is great and I think that's very interesting because remember we said a moment ago that that David's facing external threats so at first glance he's the victim not the villain but despite that he knows that he is not innocent either he's aware that he's probably done things he shouldn't have or maybe he's not done things that he should have he is part of the problem as well and often that can be an even worse feeling than the feeling of being oppressed when we realize that we've mucked things up badly ourselves so oppression hurts but we can feel comforted when we know that we're doing the right thing guilt just crushes us because we feel like we deserve everything that we get.

Fifth we have isolation David speaks about being lonely and afflicted in the midst of these struggles he feels very alone and so often it's like that and and you can even feel like that when you're surrounded by people because when we struggle often we can think we're the only ones who are like this everyone else is different everyone else seems to be so much more together and other people don't seem to be having these struggles or insecurities that I have and that of course makes us think that we can't speak to others about it and that just increases our sense of isolation and then lastly we see anxiety David says the troubles of my heart are enlarged and so often that's exactly what happens things become really big don't they that's especially the case at night where we could be lying in the comfiest bed in the coziest room safe warm and secure and yet our thoughts are plaguing us. These are some of the commonest experiences of humanity this Sam is very honest and real but that means that if you feel any or all of these things today it does not mean that you are a freak or that you're abnormal or that you're the odd one out it means that you are actually very

average. Now by average I don't mean in the sense of playing it down to say well it's average and not difficult I don't mean it in that sense what I mean is that at many points in their lives this is what we are all like. Looking at David in this Sam you see an external layer of trouble but with that is another layer of internal anguish and turmoil and this internal external mix is why diagnosing our struggles is always complicated it's why quick fixes rarely work and it's why recovery can take a long time and the

Bible explains all that to us in a very helpful way all the trouble that we face and all these things that that we experience both internally and externally are all a result of sin and theologians use a very helpful term to describe the effect that sin has had on the world it's the term total depravity. Now at first glance that can sound like a bit of a harsh term and you might think well is that saying that everybody is wicked that sounds pretty extreme well that's not what it means at all. What this term is saying is that sin has affected every area of life so it's total in terms of its scope not in terms of its degree every part of creation every human being and 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 both in our hostility towards God and towards others and in our experience of trouble and anguish ourselves but what I want to say is that I think total depravity is actually a really helpful term for two reasons at least one because the totality of the scope helps us see that struggle, struggling is something that we all experience. The person in

[15 : 24] Psalm 25 is a very average person and two because it's reminding us that in every area of our lives there is the potential for things to be rubbish in our jobs in our relationships in our families in school even in our own thoughts there's always the potential for things to be hard. Now you might be saying well that sounds really depressing Thomas I hope it's not I hope it's actually comforting because it's telling you that if your life doesn't conform to the kind of fairytale Hollywood movie myth that you have to have the perfect love life and the perfect job and and this life where all your dreams come through that if you don't have that then you're a hopeless failure actually you're just normal. The potential for rubbishness is there in any area of life and it's to be expected and I think it's important to remember that in many ways the other side of the coin to total depravity is total vulnerability. Every part of life is vulnerable to the damage that sin has caused and just like David in this Psalm we can't separate the two we can't separate the fact that there's brokenness outside of us from the fact that there's brokenness inside of us so we are part of the problem in that we're sinners and we make mistakes but we are also caught up in the problem because we find ourselves suffering as well and the fact that sin has mucked everything up the fact that the depravity and the vulnerability are total that means that the Bible is giving us a clear logical and consistent explanation for why life is sometimes really hard and I think it's very important to recognize that because the world around us will often present two alternative explanations for why life is hard. One is blame culture the other is karma so blame culture is basically saying that your struggles are everyone else's fault you're the victim they're the problem karma is basically saying well your struggles are entirely your own fault you're the problem you are getting what you deserve and I think that this is where we see that that in terms of the doctrines that try to explain suffering total depravity is not the harsh one it's telling us that we are all a bit of a mess the world around us is a mess and we're all tangled up in it together the crucial question is what do we do about it well sometimes we just battle on sometimes we try and distract ourselves sometimes we find a way of numbing our pain sometimes we just harden but if Sam 25 is the voice of an average human then I think it is true that our struggles and our difficulties will eventually take us to the place where we have nothing left to say other than oh God I need you and the brilliant thing that Sam 25 tells us is that the God we cry out to is a very awesome God if you imagine that you're back on that mountaintop again the scenery is stunning everywhere

you turn there is something amazing to see that's definitely what this Sam is like when it comes to showing us the nature and character of God you go through this Sam and it's remarkable that alongside all the struggles and difficulties that that that average humans face you also have this panorama of God's glorious attributes if you just read through the Sam you can see words jumping out words like truth salvation mercy steadfast love goodness good and upright instructs leads teaches faithfulness friendship covenant these are very very cool words and there's so much that we could say about them but I just want to summarize what this Sam says about God under under four kind of more general points first is that the Sam tells us that God is good and upright as you can see in verse 8 that's the kind of phrase that's very easy to whiz past because it seems obvious

but this tiny phrase is telling us two utterly awesome things about God it's telling us that God is good now often we'll use that phrase to give God credit when something nice happens so we get an essay in on time or we get some to get the finances that we need for our job or whatever or we recover from a health scare and we'll say God is good and that's absolutely true that's a really good thing to say but we don't want it to be the case that we only think of God's goodness when things go well because the truth is God is good at every single moment and in every single thing he does God is infinitely and eternally good so if you can draw God which I know you can't draw but if I just draw a big circle and please just forgive me the fact that that forgive me for the fact that obviously that's a hopelessly inadequate diagram but if we just use a circle to represent God what I want us to recognize is that every square millimeter that every square nanometer of that circle is good in other words there is never ever any badness in God so think of stuff that's bad deceit manipulation exploitation betrayal discrimination injustice selfishness cruelty there is not one speck of any of that in God in fact it's impossible for God to be those things

God is the very definition of goodness itself and he's the source of all other goodness it's a metaphysical impossibility for God to ever be bad and that's why alongside being good he is also upright and that basically means he is dead straight in other words he's never crooked never twisted he never does anything other than that which is right true and fair in every square millimeter of God he is upright and so that means that no matter how far you search into the nature and character of God you will never find any hidden badness or concealed deceit and when when we look at the world around us and especially maybe when we look at leaders and across the world pick one and ask if I searched every square millimeter of that person would I say that they are flawlessly good and upright second thing that that we see about

God's awesomeness is that God teaches the truth you see that emphasize in verse 20 in verse 5 and in verse 9 God does not confine his goodness and uprightness to himself he reveals it to us and he does that in order to teach us and lead us in the way he wants us to go indeed the great purpose of humanity is to bear God's image to reflect and display his goodness so God teaches us and everything he teaches us is true he teaches us that the world around us is valuable that life has a purpose that bad stuff is actually wrong that people are incredibly precious and that we are all made by him and for him God does not conceal the truth from us he doesn't abandon us to our own conclusions or laugh at us in the kind of fog of vague guesswork that we often find ourselves and no God comes to us and he speaks to us and he teaches us what is actually true so he's told us that there is order in the universe and on the basis of that truth humanity has made all sorts of amazing discoveries in science and technology he has told us that morality is real which is why we need law and order in our society because certain things like murder theft and exploitation these things are always wrong he has told us that community is essential that's why every human needs family friendship and company he's told us that death is an enemy that's why it causes so much pain and fear but the most fundamental truth that God wants you to know is that he loves you and that brings us to the third awesome thing the Sam tells us that God is full of mercy faithfulness and steadfast love we see that referred to in verse 6 and 10 these terms speak of God's compassion his commitment and his unfailing unstoppable love so God is merciful that means that no matter how broken you think you are God can say to you it's okay I can heal you I can fix you God is faithful that means that every promise he makes to you is rock solid he will never let you down and God steadfast love means that his commitment to you is absolute he wants to be in a relationship with you he'll do everything it takes to make it happen he'll carry every cost that's required if you go back in your mind to that mountaintop imagine that you're there and you know you think of that beautiful view and we think well yes that that beauty and and and splendor in front of us that's an image of God's love and it is God's steadfast love is so spectacular and beautiful but now imagine there's a storm imagine that the wind picks up darkness falls a blizzard comes in you are absolutely freezing cold you can't see a thing and you don't know where to go and now imagine a big st. Bernard dog bounding up that hill driving onwards through the snow up and up and up never stopping always looking always running always searching and eventually it finds you and you are rescued that is what God

steadfast love is like and then fourthly the psalm is telling us that God provides salvation security and friendship we see that expressed so beautifully in these verses his soul shall abide and well-being and his offspring shall inherit the land the friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him and he makes known to them his covenant so what does the God of all goodness and uprightness and truth want to do with you he wants to rescue you he wants to make you safe forever and he

wants you as his friend and this is where we see that all the awesomeness of God meets all the needs of very average people so if you're anxious God is saying I will look after you if you're isolated God is saying I will be your friend and I will never leave you if you feel guilty God is saying I can pardon you if you're full of regret God says I have more than enough mercy if you are uncertain God is saying I will teach you and if you are afraid of shame or if you feel useless or if you think that your life is a mess God is saying actually none of that matters because I love you and I'll never stop Psalm 25 is telling us that God is a very awesome God but as we conclude there's just a final point that I want I want us to make sure we remember when we think of our averageness and God's awesomeness we can very quickly feel that we're kind of very much down here and he is very much way up there a bit like that and the mess and muddle of our experience can feel like a long way from the goodness and uprightness and awesomeness of God and that's true we are nowhere near God's level he alone is God his holiness his power his glory are utterly beyond what we can take in and we kind of look at that thing well we're just below a kind of line of rubbishness where where our lives are just so often so far from what we want them to be and because of that we can often find ourselves thinking that well the only way that I can have a relationship with a God as awesome as this is if I have some awesome experience myself so we think that we need to kind of reach up to God and that might be through some kind of amazing experience like a really dramatic answer to prayer or it may be a time in our lives where we feel like we're on fire spiritually or a moment when we really know God's presence and power some extraordinary experience that that we can hold on to where where we're just for that moment we reached up closer to the level that we're supposed to be we can think to ourselves that if I just have that extraordinary experience then we can be sure that we have really entered a relationship with God and often we can find ourselves looking at people who seem to have had those experiences and we think they must be the ones that God really likes often we can conclude that the more awesome our experience is the more awesome we are the closer to God will be that is complete and utter nonsense because in

[31 : 54] terms of humanity's relationship with God the only awesome one is him but the amazing truth is that his awesomeness is so great that that is not that he's way above us his awesomeness is so great that he comes right down to meet us we think that that amazing experiences will propel us up to the awesomeness of God the truth is the awesomeness of God will come down to reach you even when your experience is rubbish that's what this Psalm is telling us the awesome God described here is big enough and strong enough and loving enough to come and reach you and when he comes and reaches you the line of rubbishness just becomes irrelevant because no matter how low you feel you are he can reach you the awesomeness of God is big enough no matter how average you feel that's what

Psalm 25 is telling us but it's not just the message of this Psalm it's the message of the whole Bible that's the whole reason that Jesus has come he came because the awesome God of the Bible is not saying to you come on come on see if you can reach me the awesome God of the Bible is saying to you I'm coming for you I'm coming alongside you and that's exactly why Jesus came to meet us in all about averageness to come alongside us in our struggles to rescue us from our sin and to restore us into a relationship with the God who is so so awesome and if you think that God can't reach you then your circle is not big enough because you you don't realize yet how awesome God actually is Christianity is revealing to us the incredible awesomeness of God and it is offering all 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 being a Christian is just blooming brilliant

Amen let us pray Dear God our Father we thank you so much for your goodness your uprightness your truth your mercy and your love and we stand before you and recognize that you are awesome but we thank you that that awesomeness is so great that you've come to rescue average people like us how we thank you for your grace and mercy and we pray that just every day of our lives we just keep looking to you we need you so much to you all Lord we lift our souls Amen