

## **“Is It Time for an Honest and Candid Conversation?”**

### **Psalm 25:1-10**

Preached by

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He made them laugh and elbow their neighbors with, of all things, a prayer. Pastor Joe Nelms was asked to have the opening prayer at a NASCAR race in Nashville last summer, and he accepted. He took the microphone and electrified the crowd with his commanding voice as he thanked God for everything related to racing, and then expressed appreciation for his family, including his “smokin’ hot wife, Lisa.” You can imagine how that went over with NASCAR fans. Perhaps he will be asked to have the opening prayer today for the most prestigious of all NASCAR races, the Daytona 500.

The prayer recorded in Psalm 25 is nothing like the one voiced by Pastor Nelms, though. It was not a public prayer meant to stir the emotions of a crowd, but a private conversation between the Psalmist and his God where he outlined his needs and expectations in this unique relationship.

The most notable feature of this prayer is the number of strong commands. There are eight of them, which meant the Psalmist was not the least bit timid or bashful.

“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; make me to know your ways; teach me your paths; lead me in your truth; be mindful of your mercy and your steadfast love; do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions.”

This is quite a list. It’s easy to see what was important to the one who voiced it.

**Why do you think the Psalmist did this?** Evidently, he felt he could be this candid with God; they had this kind of open, honest relationship.

He also had to feel God wanted to know what was in his heart and what he needed from this relationship. He stated in the Psalm that he believed God to be caring and merciful, like a loving mother. What responsible parent would not want to know what his or her children were thinking?

For the Psalmist, faith and hope were inseparable; so were faith and honesty. He believed as long as he approached God in humility and with reverence, God would carefully listen and lovingly respond.

**How does this ancient prayer speak to us today?** I think this kind of open, honest conversation needs to occur on several levels and with everyone with whom we have an on-going relationship: our mates, children, parents, siblings, friends, neighbors, students, teachers, co-workers, business partners and anyone else whose life frequently intersects ours. Healthy communication is at the heart of relationships and can prevent many problems or resolve the ones which inevitably arise.

On a recent visit to my daughter's house, I witnessed a remarkable exchange between her four-year-old twins, Kate and Jack. Kate did something to hurt Jack, and he was upset. Of course, this is her mission in life right now, so she seemed quite pleased.

I have no idea what she did, but was overwhelmed by Jack's response. He looked at her and said, "Kate, we need to have a conversation!" He sat in the floor with his legs crossed and waited for her to sit down in front of him, which she did.

"Kate, you hurt me," he said. "Why did you hurt me?" he asked.

She said nothing. He repeated it, and this time he added, "And you owe me an apology!"

After about thirty seconds of silence, Kate reluctantly apologized, and they got up and went their separate ways.

I went straight to Amy and told her what I experienced. "Dad, it doesn't happen this way every time," she informed me, "but they are learning to tell each other what they need or expect and to resolve their differences without always fighting."

"Out of the mouth of babes..." This reinforced my suspicion that our kids will teach us as much, if not more, about life than our parents.

**Communication is important to developing healthy relationships.** It can prevent a lot of frustration, disappointment and arguments. Obviously, the Psalmist believed this, and it became a big part of his spiritual formation.

**What do we need to know about good communication?** I pondered this last week and drafted some guidelines.

Don't assume people know what you need or expect from them.

Identify what you need so you can clearly share it.

Give examples of what you mean so others fully understand.

Avoid being disrespectful, condescending, judgmental, sarcastic or intimidating.

Express appreciation when others take you seriously and treat you with respect, holding those who don't accountable.

Model the behavior you expect from others. Ask what they need from you and do it.

Forgive those who fail to live up to your expectations and ask for forgiveness when you do wrong.

I enjoy pre-marital counseling because it is fun to watch young couples interact with each other. One thing I do is have the couple turn and face each other, completely ignoring me. I tell them to look each other in the eye and speak directly to one another. I prompt them to answer these statements:

The three most important things I need from you are...

The things you can say or do which will shut me down and send me inside a shell like a turtle are...

The things you can say or do which will bring a smile to my face and motivate me to do and be my best are...

I process information and make decisions by...

I handle criticism by...

I deal with adversity by...

I re-charge my batteries by...

Discussions like this need to occur on many levels, starting with family members, but moving beyond them. What relationship do you need to work on this week? What role does communication play in it?

**Who can help you?** I am confident God will. God knows the value of honest communication to healthy relationships. The Psalmist did, too. I hope we do, and will make this a priority as the Psalmist did.