

God's Loving Paths

During this Season of Lent, we reflect on what it means to journey through life as God leads us. The psalmist trusts that God is faithful in mercy and steadfast love, and calls all to follow in God's paths of truth. As we explore God's promise for all humankind, we rejoice in God's saving love made known to us in the new life that Christ proclaims.

Focus Scripture: Psalm 25:1–10

The book of Psalms is a collection of poems and songs, and includes many different poetic forms. Because we read psalms in translation, we miss some of the wordplay in the original Hebrew text. For example, Psalm 25 is an acrostic – in which each verse begins with one of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. This is the psalmist's experience of God "from A to Z."

The psalmist prays for guidance and deliverance, alternating cries for help with expressions of trust. "Do not let my enemies exult over me," the writer pleads. In contrast to such treachery is the vision of the righteous life, a life of knowing and following God's paths.

Why does the psalmist think that God will hear and respond? The psalmist trusts God because God has been merciful and loving in the past. Over centuries, God has forged a relationship with the Hebrew people, a relationship in which God's goodness and mercy have been showered upon them again and again. God has made a covenant with the people – a promise to sustain and uphold them. God's people have been called to respond to such steadfast love by keeping God's laws and following God's paths.

The path or the way is a frequent metaphor in the story of the people of Israel. God guided Abraham on a journey to the land of promise. God brought the people of Israel out of Egypt, travelling with them through the wilderness. The religious life, as the Bible describes it, is not one of standing still – it is living along paths that follow God's way. A path becomes easier to follow the more it is used. The more we seek God's paths, the easier they are to find. God teaches us how to live in righteousness, following paths that lead from old to new ways.

Verse 10 describes God's paths as "steadfast love," *hesed*. This Hebrew word describes

a kinship relationship. God chooses to be linked with us in bonds of kinship. God's ways are the ways of one who is like family to us. We are not bound to God by a legal agreement. We are part of God's family, loved by God. We respond to this steadfast love by honouring God's laws.

Genesis 9:8–17 is the first description of a covenant in the Bible. God promises Noah never again to destroy the earth. God has set a "bow in the clouds" so that an arrow shot from it would be aimed away from earth – God will not turn against humankind. This is a one-sided covenant; no response is required from Noah. God, in goodness and love, chooses to be bound with all creation, promising to preserve and not destroy.

1 Peter 3:18–22 refers to the days of Noah, when a few righteous people were saved through water. Christians, Peter says, are people of the new covenant, sealed in their baptism with water. God has raised Christ to new life, and we share in that life.

We begin the Season of Lent with the story of Jesus' baptism and the voice from heaven declaring that Jesus is God's beloved son (**Mark 1:9–15**). After a period of preparation and testing in the wilderness, Jesus begins his ministry, proclaiming the good news (gospel) that God's reign is breaking into the world in a new way.

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The psalmist lifts up life's experiences to God, as do we as we learn to live in God's ways. We call upon God to help us in our journey, with confidence that God's steadfast and loving relationship with us will sustain us. How in your own life are you learning to live in God's loving paths? What are the signposts that help you discern this way?

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Focus Scripture
Psalm 25:1–10

Additional Scriptures
Genesis 9:8–17
1 Peter 3:18–22
Mark 1:9–15

Teach us your paths, O God, and lead us in your truth. You have been steadfast in your love for us, and merciful in welcoming and sustaining us. Forgive us when we move away from your loving paths, and strengthen us to follow in your way. Amen.

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

