

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Here I Am, Lord: With My Problems**  
Psalm 25:16-22  
December 17, 2017

***Pastor Michael Novotny***

Hello, I'm Pastor Mike Novotny with Time of Grace. I don't want to call a member of my church a liar but I never actually believe him. Whenever I see him on Sunday mornings and I ask, "Hey, how are you doing?" He always replies with the same words: "Living the dream!" And part of me just wants to say really? Is this your dream? This life, this job that you have, this family dynamic, is this as good as it gets for you cause I have this sneaking suspicion that this isn't the dream; that your life is a lot like mine and it has problems.

Maybe you can relate to that? Problems at home, problems in your heart, problems with your body, problems with your family, problems with your soul; we all have problems and that's why today, Pastor Mark Jeske is going to remind us that there's a place that we can go with our problems. We can go to God - honestly, transparently - and say, "Here I am, Lord, with all my problems."

***Pastor Mark Jeske***

The blues songs were written by people who knew suffering; that's why they're called blues. There's pain in them. There's longing. There's heartbreak in them. There's busted romances and frustrating economic circumstances. There's a hard scrabble, hard scruffing kind of life where you're scratching and scruffing just to try to stay alive; just staying one jump ahead of the grim reaper. People letting you down; people betraying you. The blues are full of the concepts of authentic human pain in plain easy to understand language and so are the Psalms – some of which are for praising, some of which are prophetic of the Messiah; there's a number of very clearly messianic psalms in the collection of one hundred and fifty. Some are teaching psalms; they narrate and explain some of the great events of God's work in human history. And some of them are cries of pain from the heart of believers in very clear and plain language, which God has placed in the Bible to give you a vocabulary for how to talk to him.

This is the great power of Psalms for you; why there's so satisfying to go and read and to say to God over and over because unlike everything else in the Bible, they're not giving you instruction, they're not really sermons, they're not really like history; they're mostly not there for recording history. The Psalms are devotional language that you can use when you are talking to God. And there are at least a dozen of them that I call the blues songs of the Bible and I'd like to read one with you today. It's Psalm 25 and I'd like to read just the last stanza with you today because there are times when your heart is heavy and you feel some brokenness in your own life, too. And one of the things that I hope you have as a takeaway from our little Bible study today is that you don't have to hold back from being honest with God.

First of all, the things that you bring to him are not all that new. He's been watching human behaviors for thousands and thousands of years. Second, you can't scare him. Third, he wants

you to be honest with him. Just as if you're a parent of a teenager and you know your kid is really struggling with something – maybe it's sexual temptation, maybe it's a temptation to get into drugs or to go drinking secretly with buddies or that you're starting to hang out with a bad crowd, starting to slide into crime – you don't want your kid to bottle this all up and try to handle it on their own. If you have a kid who's troubled, you want that kid to feel that the kid can be honest with you, that she can tell you what she's really feeling and what's going on, and you want your son to be able to have the confidence and trust to be able to say, "Dad, I am struggling with something right now and I'm making a mess of my life and I'm afraid it's going to get worse."

And so here's my invitation to you not to be afraid or hold back but to be totally honest with your God when you talk with him. For one, you're not telling him anything he doesn't know. Do you think he can't see you? God sees what's going on in your life. It's not like he's starving for information. But he can't develop his relationship with you where it needs to go until you're communicating with him, until you're honest and tell him the truth. Even when it seems to reflect badly on him, when it implies some criticisms like you don't like how he's treating you, go ahead! He's got big shoulders; he can take it. If you don't like something, tell him. If you have complaints, say it. You can't – you're not going to like hurt his feelings. If there's something bugging you, out with it. If it's something you're really ashamed of and you can't even bear to say it, he knows it all anyway. But it's healthy for you to say it, to get it out there. And I'd like to go through the last little stanza of Psalm 25 – one of the blues songs in the Bible – with you today. Written by somebody that maybe at first thought you wouldn't think would ever be singing the blues. I mean, David had a magic life, didn't he? Think about it! He's a superhero. The Bible calls him a man after God's own heart. Jesus Christ, one of his favorite titles for himself, is the Son of David. He's a giant in the history of the people of God. So you think here's a guy with a golden life. Man, I'd love to be him!

He says, "Lord, turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely." Lonely? Dave, seriously? How could you be lonely? Everybody knows you; everybody loves you. "I'm lonely and I'm afflicted." You know, you can be lonely surrounded by people, can't you? Yeah. In fact, some of the loneliest people are in the biggest cities of America. When you're feeling isolated, the more people you pack into your frame of view, the lonelier you feel because it looks like everybody else has it going on but not me. When there's something not right in your life and the relationships aren't working, you can feel lonely even when you are at a ballgame or watching basketball at an arena. You can feel lonely at the State Fair because when you feel cut off from people, when stuff is not working, when you do not have some good relationships with your family, everything goes sour. When you're not doing right with God, when you're arguing with God, fighting with him, not listening, the guilt that sits on you disrupts everything else in your life. It's like when your body is hurting – like when you have back trouble – you can't hardly walk straight, everything hurts. Just when something goes bad here between two vertebrae, everything in your life suddenly is just bollixed up, isn't it? You know that concept. So even David could say, "I feel lonely. I feel afflicted," and he did have some hard sledding.

David was extraordinarily blessed by God but he also had a hard life. And then even in the best of times, even when there were not those civil wars going on with Adonijah, for instance – another of his sons – also ended up losing his life for an attempt at disrupting the dynasty. Even

in the 33 years after Saul had died was at war around him almost constantly. Our country has not had warfare within the continental United States in a long, long time. In fact, arguably ever since the ending of the Civil War, we have more or less had peace time within the continental United States. David almost never had peace. By my initial count, he went through 14 major wars with the nations around him. So here is a guy who knew struggle, who knew fear, but who also had the honesty and courage to actually lay it out with God and say it – say what he was really feeling – and then call on God for help. He had the humility to ask for help. Hard for us men to do. Hard enough for women; it's twice as hard for us men to ask for help.

So he says to God – and I'm in verse 16 now; we're just going to read that to the end. Here's his blues song. He's got his little harp and he's playing a blues song: "Turn to me and be gracious to me, I'm lonely." I need help with my relationships. I need not to feel so isolated. Lord, help me by revealing more of your presence to me so I feel connected. "I feel afflicted." I have afflictions. Heal me and help me. "The troubles of my heart have multiplied," this is emotional for him. He was grieving over what he had lost – not only from what other people were doing to him but what he was doing to other people and this is what made it worse. He said, "Free me from my anguish. Look on my affliction and distress and take away all my sins." In other words, some of my problems are self-inflicted. If you read 1 and 2 Samuel, you will read the story of David's disintegration, his moral disintegration. He saw a woman named Bathsheba and he was overcome with lust even though he was married already by that time and so was she to different people. But his covetous desire for this woman was so great, he simply kicked down one rule and commandment of God after another.

First, he kept his eyes gazing on her. Instead of turning his eyes away and his heart away, he indulged and immersed himself in fantasies about being with her. Then used his power as king to invite her into the palace. When she became pregnant, he then did his best to arrange a cover up so that possibly her husband would be the one fingered for the pregnancy and would become identified as the father but they were at war, as usual; they were always at war, it seems, at that era of Israel's history and Uriah never went back home during that time. So David arranged for a military assassination, arranged with his command in chief, Joab, to make Uriah's death look like a military, you know, fortunes of war. But in fact, he was set up. So David – it was a cold blooded murder, is what it was. That's how low he had sunk and finally confronted to this – with all the lies and everything – all finally came out.

Another time, David had been explicitly instructed by God: "I don't want you trusting in your army. That's not the source of your power. I am the source of all good in your life. Do not take a military census; I do not want you gloating over the size of your army or its amount of weaponry." It's like telling kids, "Don't put beans in your ears." The very act of telling them that makes them want to do it. It's like when I saw – I know how this works – I saw one time a revolving door in a hospital, you know, the doors that go like this, and it said, "No strollers through here, please." What do you think is the first thing to go through my head? I could get a stroller through here easy! I would have never thought of it until that sign said don't do it. I wanted to do it immediately because it said I couldn't. What do I care whether I get a stroller through that door? What do I care about strollers? Jeepers. But I have this impulse to fight against anybody who tries to cramp down on my freedom to do whatever I want. And David said, "I think I'm going to do a census," and his homies tried to talk him out of it: "Don't do it.

Man, don't do it!" And he did it anyway and a terrible plague came upon the people of Israel as a result and David knew it's my fault. It's so much more fun to blame other people but sometimes –and this is part of the blues songs – ain't nobody's fault but mine! I did it. That's part of our song.

"See how my enemies have increased." How can this be? Who would want to do something against me? This is honest talk about the fact that you feel overwhelmed. "Guard my life, Lord, and rescue me." You have the ability to limit and to reduce the amount of bad stuff happening in my life and I'm counting on you to do that for me. "Let me not be put to shame. I take refuge in you. May integrity and uprightness protect me because my hope is in you." Now that doesn't mean that if I act in a holy and perfect and pure way then I will have a dome of protection over me as though this is based on my performance. That's not what David means by that line. He knows this is not based on his moral perfection because he knows what a moral pig he was at certain times in his life. He's not going to bet on his, the integrity of his spirit and his heart. What he's saying here is that even when I cannot see an immediate answer to my prayers and an immediate deliverance for these afflictions, troubles, griefs and woes that are coming on me right now, I am not going to turn on God and descend to the level of my enemies. I am not going to return evil for evil, violence for violence. Even when Saul was chasing after David, trying to kill him, David – on at least two occasions – had Saul right in his power, had the ability to cut off his head with one swing of his sword, and didn't do it. In fact, one time what he did do was cut off a piece of Saul's cloak – he was that close – and then sent the piece of cloth by messenger to say, "I could have killed you yesterday but I didn't."

David is basically saying, "I am going to live God's way and I'm going to trust and wait and I'm not going to cave in and live down to the level of the people who are harassing me." "May integrity and uprightness protect me." Lord, because I want to show by my words and my life that I am trusting in you.

Here's where this all hooks in now with Easter. The resurrection of Christ guarantees some important things in your and my life. It guarantees, number one, that what he did on the cross on Good Friday was not a wasted, horrible, pointless exercise. If Jesus had died and been buried and that was the end of the story, all we'd have is another case of a man unjustly convicted and executed for things that he did not do. A terrible story, to be sure, but get in line. Human history is full of injustices, full of reckless, pointless violence that lands on people who were not deserving of it. What changes everything though is that Easter takes what happened on Good Friday and applies it to you and to me for there on the cross he received punishment for the sins of the world, which includes you and me. He bore unjust condemnation to provide acquittal for you. He paid a terrible price so that you and I could be declared paid in full. He suffered condemnation so that you might celebrate being acquitted. In fact, you're acquitted in advance. It's like a get out of hell free card that you've been given now and Easter proves it. By his bursting out of the grave, he enjoys the Father's approval on everything he did. So God right now is smiling at you. When you go and pray to him, you may think, "Oh, I'm just making up a little mind game here. Nobody's listening; I'm mumbling to myself, I'm talking to myself, but nothing's happening. All my messages are just going like this; they're going up in the air and then they just land on the ground and never get delivered like mail to Santa Claus, which ends up in the federal post office in Washington, D.C. and somebody opens it up and reads it but it never

gets to the north pole because there's no post office on the north pole, am I right about that? It's mail that never reaches its intended destination because mail to Santa Claus is to an invisible and non-existent person.

And some people make you think that your prayers are that very same thing

I saw a western once and this old tough guy says to the Spanish priest: "Padre, I ain't no good at praying. I don't beg nobody for nothing." And if that's your style, if that's what you choose, you're going to have a tough life and you'll be singing the blues a lot. I'd like to encourage you to look at Easter, to transform the way you think about your relationship with God and your prayer life with him. It's not begging. You're not begging God. You're talking to your Daddy about stuff that's happening that's real in your life. You're talking to your Daddy who's smiling at you and enjoying hearing you communicate with the agenda and issues in your life and he, in love for you, already sets in motion answers to each of the things that you say. And here's how you can tell this: If you just live long, look backwards, and all the stuff that was bothering and grinding on you ten years ago is not so much today. Why? Luck? Coincidence? Don't know? In his own way and in his own time, God helped you overcome the challenges that you had ten years ago and one year ago and even one month ago. But we're a little amnesiac, you know, we kind of forget.

But here's some encouragement – look at God's track record of bringing you to this point and then look forward knowing that you are stepping out into your life with this going for you. The forgiveness of all of your sins as David, an adulterer and liar and murderer could be forgiven and restored, you are, too. And your own failings of the past have not destroyed your relationship with your God.

Second, he loves you. He's crazy in love with you and looking down on you with a smile on his face. Three, he sends his holy angels to limit the damage that the demons from hell can do in your life. Four, he makes even your hardships – as you heard in our Scripture reading today from Hebrews 12 – he makes even our hardships work for us. From God's point of view, though David was crying out and groaning as he was running on the lam from Saul, hiding in his caves, God was thinking, "I can make this work. This will work for him. I can make this work."

You know, I heard a wise Christian writer once say, "You be careful when you pray for humility," which is a good thing, isn't it? Who wants to be a proud jerk? So if you say, "Lord, teach me humility," you better be prepared maybe to be busted down the ladder a couple of rungs. And from God's point of view, that is not necessarily a bad thing. Let him do that! Let him work to bless you – sometimes with prosperity, and fattening you up – and sometimes the lean years come. It's all good. In the grand scheme of things, God is making you a better person, making you more valuable to him.

And let me close with just saying something I've observed in my many years on this planet. I've got a few to go, I hope, but most of my life, I know, the majority of my life is behind me. Less on this earth in front of me; my eternity is in front of me. But here's things that I've noticed: The people who most are encouraging to me in my life, whose words have the most powerful impact on my heart, when they're talking to me about how to handle stress, problems, betrayal, wounds, failure – whether in me or in other people – when I feel under assault, when I'm being

stressed, the people whose counsel is most powerful to me are people who themselves have experienced brokenness. Words of encouragement may be coming from someone in a wheelchair. People telling me that God can still love me who've maybe had some jail time themselves and spent some time in prison. People encouraging me about what God does who are survivors of a terrible cancer battle that had them fearful of losing their lives.

But that – those wounds and scars and brokenness in their life makes them even more powerful for God and even more dangerous and threatening to Satan because they are giving testimony to the fact that God kept the promises he's made and answered them, answered their blues songs to God, in a positive way to help them go forward. And I encourage you to see what God did in David's life to lift him up out of the pits that he was in. He will do that for you, as well. Just make God – let's see, where's the verse I'm looking for; excuse me – “Make God your refuge,” that's the word – the verse – that I was looking for; verse twenty. David said, “I take refuge to you.” Run to that safe place as well yourself. “My hope is in you, O Lord.” When I'm singing the blues, I know you've got answers for me and I'm going to wait to see what you're going to do as I bring you my needs. In Jesus' name, this is good news for God's people, Amen.

### ***Pastor Michael Novotny***

A few months ago, I gave a presentation at a local high school where I said something that I had never said before and, to be honest, I'm not sure that I even believed it. Speaking to a group of high school sophomores, I asked them a simple question and the question was this: What if you just loved each other? I was talking about a sensitive topic about pornography and sexual struggles inside the Christian church. And I could give them all sorts of advice but that simple question came to me: What if you just loved each other? What if in the midst of all your problems you didn't have to be afraid of judgment, about condemnation, about gossip, about rumors? What if any one of you could stand up and all the Christians in this classroom would just love you? What if it would encourage you and support you and keep you accountable? What if they would remind you of the great love of the greatest problem solver, Jesus Christ?

I know that sounds crazy; these were high school teenagers. To ask them to love seemed impossible but I'd been praying that simple prayer and that's my prayer for you, too. What if you just loved each other? In the midst of all these problems, what if we as God's people loved each other? And maybe we can't change high school culture, maybe we can't change the world, but what if we could change our families? Our small group Bible studies? What if we could change just one church at a time? What if instead of judgment and condemnation there was just grace? Where any Christian could stand up with any problem and the reaction would always be the same: You know that God loves you, right? You know that Jesus solved that problem, right? I know it's crazy to think about but that's the beautiful church that Jesus himself died to create.

Would you join me and pray?

Dear Jesus, we are so grateful that our greatest problems have already been solved. Being distant from God, that you fixed it. Having to spend eternity apart from God, you fixed it. Being unloved or unforgiven for just a single moment in this life or in the life to come, you fix all of it.

Thank you for going through all the problems that you did in this life; that we would have no problems in the life to come.

And now, God, we pray that you would sustain us. Jesus, you said that in this world we would have trouble; not everyone would love us or appreciate us or approve of us and so we need your help. In the midst of this problematic life, we need your grace and we need your sustaining strength. So be with us. Open our eyes to the problems that have already been solved that we would trust you and lean on you in our deepest struggles. We pray all these things in Jesus' beautiful name, Amen.

For Time of Grace, I'm Pastor Mike Novotny and it all starts now.