

Now, I'm not a dancer. Those of you who have been at wedding receptions with me know that, but I do know that ballroom dancing requires the partners to be on the same page—thinking the same, anticipating the same, moving the same. When they're not, when they're not on the same page, their dancing is awkward, at best; ugly, at worst. In much the same way, we who have entrusted our soul to the Lord for protection and forgiveness will dance with him, not with the world. And as we dance with the Lord, we want to remember that he has the lead. That's where taking up our cross becomes so important. While it's so easy to do so, we don't want to tell God what the best way for us to live is. We don't want to lecture God on what makes for a good childhood, what makes for fulfilled teenage years, what makes for a happy marriage, and so forth. We want to defer to our dancing partner, for his guidance isn't only good, it's perfect. David says, *"All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of his covenant."* The Lord knows us because he made us, he redeemed us, and he sanctified us. And what he wants for us is only the best.

So how do we learn the steps to God's tango? How do we learn to dance with him and let him take the lead? We go to the owner's manual. We go to his Word. So get into your Bible. Commit to spending five-ten minutes a day in God's Word. Read it. Memorize it. Live it. Attend Bible class. Join a small group. Whatever it takes to get you into the owner's manual, do it. My friends, entrust your soul to the Lord, for he guides you by his Word.

Without a doubt, we'll look pretty silly to the world when we dance with the Lord. The world will laugh that we would rather increase our offerings to support God's work than buy the latest electronic device. They'll laugh when we decline an invitation to a beer bash because we want to be clearheaded for church the next day. They'll laugh when we let our light shine for the Lord. Let them laugh, for David says, *"No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause."* We'll never be put to shame because the Lord rescues us from our enemies, he forgives us of our sins, and he guides us by his Word. So today we say with David: *"In you, Lord my God, I put my trust. I trust in you."* Amen.

Psalm 25:1-22 – *Take Up Your Cross* – 367, 232 (1, 3), 515, 588
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What is the most valuable thing you own? To ask it another way, if your house was on fire, and there was only one thing you could retrieve, what would you go back for? What would you risk life and limb to save? Would it make a difference if your children were in the house? Or your spouse? Or your parents? Or your pet?

Now, the way I've asked this question may not be fair, for I've implied that your answer has to be something tangible—a thing, a person, or a pet. I think—I hope—we'd all agree that the most valuable thing we own is our soul. Jesus once asked, *"What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?" (Mt 16:26)* Jesus denotes our soul as our most valuable possession, because it's the only thing we own that lasts forever. Now, that's both good news and bad news. It's good news if our soul is headed for the eternal joys of heaven, but it's bad news if our soul is bound for the eternal fires of hell. Heaven and hell are the only two options for the afterlife, the only two places where our soul will spend eternity. That being the case, to whom do we want to entrust our soul for safekeeping? Today, as we begin a short, three-week series on taking up our cross, David urges us, whether we are young, old, or in between:

Entrust Your Soul to the Lord

- 1. He rescues you from your enemies.**
- 2. He forgives you of your sins.**
- 3. He guides you by his Word.**

1. David gets right to the heart of the matter, when he begins, *"In you, LORD my God, I put my trust. I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me."* Often in the days of our youth, spiritual matters are the farthest thing from our mind. So much else occupies our attention—things like school and dating, acne and hormones, how we feel and how we look. But that doesn't change the fact that we have enemies. David doesn't tell us who his enemies, but we know from Scripture that some of his worst enemies were those who were closest to him. Do you remember how David was repaid for his faithful service to King Saul? He was hunted down like a dog, as you and I would search the house for a mouse. Do you recall how his own son, Absalom, rebelled against him and forced him to flee from his palace—ashamed and humiliated?

Similarly, it seems that the worst enemies we face are often those closest to us. When our child doesn't return the love we showed them from birth, when our marriage crumbles and the one who promised to care for us is now the one who's hurting us, when a best friend betrays a confidence and humiliates us at school—these are the things that cut deeply. Perhaps you feel today the way David did, when he put these words to parchment: *"For I am lonely and afflicted. Relieve the troubles of my heart and free me from my anguish."*

How do we deal with these feelings and with the enemies who caused them? David says, *"My eyes are ever on the LORD, for only he will release my feet from the snare."* Isn't that an interesting way to describe a problem? If we're walking through the woods and get our foot caught in a trap, wouldn't we look down at the contraption clamped on our ankle to figure out a way to remove it? Though David feels as if he's caught in a snare, he keeps his eyes fixed on the Lord and not on the problem. He's learned that it's only the Lord who can rescue him from his enemies. As someone wiser than me once said, *"Maximize the Lord and minimize the problem."* It seems to me that all too often we minimize the Lord and maximize the problem.

That's not to say that we should close our eyes to the problem. We need to deal with it, but let's do so in such a way that we don't take our eyes off the Lord. He will rescue us. That's his promise. With the Apostle Paul we can say, *"The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom" (2 Tm 4:18).* And through Paul God says to us, *"Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Ro 12:19).* God is telling us that he'll deal with our enemies, so we don't have to. We don't even have to hold a grudge against them, nor are we to do so. God knows what our enemies are doing to us, and he'll mete out justice in his own time and in his own way. We are simply to love our enemies, knowing that God loves us and has our back. My friends, entrust your soul to the Lord, for it is he who rescues you from your enemies.

2. But before we get all wrapped up thinking about how God will avenge us, let's remember that our worst enemy lives inside of us. It's our sinful nature and, knowing that, we have even greater reason to entrust our soul to the Lord. For it is only he who can forgive our sins. In verse 11, the middle verse of the psalm, which is often the theme verse of the psalm, David says, *"For the sake of your name, LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great."*

David calls his sin *"iniquity,"* a word that literally means *"twisted."* Perhaps we don't consider ourselves twisted, like David, who committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband, Uriah, murdered. The fact of the matter is that, whenever we break any part of God's law, no matter how small an infraction it may seem to us, we've twisted away from the perfection God demands of us. So, yes, when we roll our eyes at Mom when she asks us to straighten up our room or brush out teeth, we show ourselves to be twisted. When we're envious of a classmate who aces test after test without even cracking a book, we're twisted. When we text while driving or mutter under our breath at the driver who cuts us off where the two lanes merge, we're twisted. How far do we have to twist before we're on the path to hell? About as far as we have to twist the handlebars on a bike to end up in the ditch. In other words, not far at all. In fact, God tells us quite plainly, *"Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (Ja 2:10).*

All of us are twisted—more than we know—and it's only God who can straighten us out. That's what he does with forgiveness. David says, *"Remember, LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, LORD, are good."*

When God forgives us, he does more than straighten us out, and he does more than put us on the track to heaven. God gives us heaven, as a gift, free of charge, no strings attached. He does so because he chooses to remember Jesus instead of our sins. Martin Luther once said, *"When God looks at the believer in Christ, he sees Christ."* He sees people who are clothed in Jesus' perfection and bathed in Jesus' blood. In a very real sense, he sees little Christs. So, go ahead, tell God about your sins. Confess your iniquities to him. Whether they're the sins you committed in your youth, last week, or just today, God won't see them. He'll see his Son, his sinless Son, your Savior, Jesus Christ. Your sins are that completely forgiven by him. My friends, entrust your soul to the Lord, for he forgives your sins—all of them.

3. Being assured of our forgiveness in Christ will lead us to entrust ourselves to him for guidance. David says, *"Good and upright is the LORD; therefore, he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way."* Someone once defined the word *"guidance"* like this: "God-u-&-i-dance."