

Sermon, July 13, 2025

Deuteronomy 30:9-14; Psalm 25:1-10

Near to Your Heart

Embracing God's Promise of Life and Obedience

Introduction

Beloved brothers and sisters, today we explore a passage from Deuteronomy 30, filled with hope, promise, and profound spiritual truth. In these verses, Moses is addressing the Israelites as they stand on the brink of entering the Promised Land, offering them not only encouragement but a vision of the closeness of God's word. This passage speaks as powerfully to us today, as we stand on the brink of hiring a new pastor, as it did to the people of Israel, reminding us that God's will for us is not distant or unattainable, but "very near," accessible, and written upon our hearts.

I. The Context: A People on the Threshold

Let us first set the scene. The Israelites, after forty years of wandering, are about to cross into the land promised to their ancestors. They have experienced God's deliverance from Egypt, God's provision in the wilderness, and God's covenant at Sinai. Now, as they prepare to enter a new phase of their history, Moses reminds them of God's covenant faithfulness and the blessings that await should they remain faithful.

In Deuteronomy 30, Moses is not only reviewing the law but also casting a vision of restoration and renewal. He tells the people that even if they have been scattered and have turned away, God's grace is always waiting to gather, heal, and restore. Verse 9 assures them: "Then the Lord your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. The Lord will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your ancestors."

This is not just prosperity in material terms, it is prosperity of the soul. God's blessing encompasses every part of their lives: their families, their work, their land, and their relationship with the Divine. God's delight is not in mere ritual, but in the fullness of life, in the flourishing of God's people.

II. The Heart of the Passage: God's Command Is Near

But how are the people to live in such blessing? The answer, Moses says, is not far off, not beyond reach. Let us hear verses 11 through 14 afresh:

"For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it."

Pause and let that sink in. The word is not inaccessible. It is not reserved for the elite, the

scholar, or the mystic alone. It is not distant, as though we needed a celestial ladder to climb, nor does it require us to cross perilous seas. God's will is not a secret, whispered only in heavenly courts or found in distant lands. The word is "very near"—in mouth and in heart.

III. The Accessibility of God's Will

This passage confronts a misconception that has persisted through the ages: that God's will is hidden, obscure, or impossibly difficult. Yet, God's desire for us is clear and accessible. The commandments are not burdensome, but pathways to life. God's word—God's guidance, God's instruction, God's invitation to life—is inscribed not just on tablets of stone, but on living hearts.

This is a remarkable democratization of spiritual knowledge. In a time when many ancient cultures reserved sacred teachings for the few, Deuteronomy declares that God's word is available to all—young and old, rich and poor, leader and laborer. God meets each of us where we are, bringing wisdom within reach.

Consider how this transforms our understanding of obedience and discipleship. We need not search endlessly or despair of our ability to please God. The Spirit writes God's law upon our hearts, and the invitation is not to a labyrinth of rules, but to a living relationship.

In these difficult economic times, how much we want to hear Deuteronomy's promise that God will make us abundantly prosperous in our undertakings and in the fruit of our bodies, livestock, and soil (30:9). No need for another stimulus package. A God-ensured economic recovery must surely be right around the corner. Yet, as a response to this reading, Psalm 25 leads us to pause and contemplate what it means to prosper in God.

Psalm 25:1-10 is not a heartfelt expression of gratitude for a windfall, but a heartfelt expression of trust in God. "The first ten verses of the psalm, which we are considering today, constitute, at root, a theological reflection and heartfelt plea rising out of that reflection."¹ In fact, rather than a rousing chorus of "Happy Days Are Here Again," these verses are an introit to *lament* and an expression of the trust that makes it possible to *complain* to God. The psalmist asks God for instruction on how to avoid shame and disgrace and then provides instruction for those who wait on the Lord.

Prayer - to prosper in God is to adopt a stance in life that is embodied and embedded in prayer. "To you, O Lord, I lift my soul," the psalmist declares (25:1). Anyone who has regularly sung Psalm 141 as part of Vespers or Evening Prayer will find in these simple words a profound description of prayer. To lift up one's soul to God is shorthand for lifting up one's hands in an outstretched position in prayer. The gesture signifies holding one's conscious identity, one's life, outstretched to God in sole and complete dependence upon God and God's help. To pray, "To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul" (25:1) "is a psalmist synonym for 'In you I trust' (verse 2) ... and 'I wait for you' (verses 3-5, 21)." To prosper in God is to own and acknowledge one's utter dependence upon God.

Help and Instruction – Looking back to the Deuteronomy passage which moves quickly from a promise of economic prosperity (verse 9) to a subtle call to obey God, observe God's commandments, and to turn to God with all one's heart and soul (10). In like manner, Psalm 25 links God's help and God's instruction or guidance. The psalmist asks for both. The soul lifted up to the Lord and set squarely on God does not distinguish between God's saving power and everlasting covenant and God's teaching. In fact, the former comes in and through the latter. To prosper in God is to be open to and eager for God's instruction. This sounds obvious and inviting. Yet, Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) reminds us

that God's ways may be difficult, counter-intuitive, even absurd. God's paths may run counter to our best thinking and our understanding of God's will. God's truth will surely challenge and contradict what we understand it means to prosper. The psalm reminds us that God's instruction comes from prayer rather than study, from God rather than human wisdom and human teachers. Though helpful, reason and common sense are insufficient. To prosper in God is to trust God enough to receive the help that comes with God's teaching.

Bold and Selective Remembering - The psalmist demonstrates that prospering in God includes trusting God enough to boldly exhort God to selective remembering. The psalmist calls the Teacher to whom he looks for instruction and guidance to remember "your mercy" (25:6), to forget "my transgressions," and to "remember me according to your steadfast love and for the sake of your goodness" (25:7). God is asked to remember God's own goodness and love because they are from everlasting and to forget the psalmist's youthful sin, which is in the past.

God is Gracious and Upright - We can receive God's instruction and ask God to selectively remember because of who God is. "You are gracious and upright, O Lord," the psalmist declares (25:8). God is compassionate and merciful. Then the psalmist elaborates. God teaches (as opposed to punishes or rejects) sinners in God's way. God leads the lowly in justice. All God's paths—which the psalmist has asked God to teach him (25:4)—are steadfast love and faithfulness (25:10). Faced with waiting, surrounded by enemies who are treacherous and seek to put to shame, burdened by one's own sin, we can trust our gracious and upright God whose ways are steadfast love and faithfulness. Prospering in God comes from actively trusting in God and eagerly longing for God's response.

Even as our government and our churches seek a plan for fiscal prosperity, Psalm 25 provides a plan for prospering in God. The psalmist's plan is to pray to God, actively acknowledging the utter dependence upon God, receiving the help that comes with God's instruction, and exhorting God to selective remembering. This kind of prosperity is only possible because of who God is, the gracious and upright Lord who, in the words of the reading from Deuteronomy, "will make you abundantly prosperous" (30:9).

IV. The Word Made Flesh: Fulfillment in Christ

For those of us who read these words through the lens of Christ, we see their fulfillment in Jesus. The apostle Paul, in Romans 10, quotes this very passage as he proclaims the nearness of Christ: "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart." Through Christ, God's word truly became flesh and dwelled among us. No longer must we ask, "Who will ascend to heaven?" for Christ has come down. No need to cross the abyss, for Christ has bridged the gap.

The gospel is not a distant hope or an unreachable ideal. It is incarnate. It is as near as our own breath and speech, as close as our own hearts. Through the Spirit, God's presence saturates our lives, enabling us to live in love and righteousness. The law is fulfilled in love—love for God and neighbor, love that is lived out in daily acts of compassion and justice.

V. The Call to Choose Life

But with this nearness comes responsibility. Earlier in chapter 30, Moses sets before the people a choice: "I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity." The

nearness of God's word means that life and blessing are not accidental—they are chosen. We are invited to respond to God's grace, to say "yes" to the life that is offered.

This is not a one-time decision, but a daily turning—choosing life, not just for us, but for our communities and our world. God's word calls us to justice, mercy, humility, and peace. It calls us to forgiveness and reconciliation, to care for the vulnerable, to build up and not tear down. Each day, we have the privilege and the challenge of embodying this nearness, of letting God's word become flesh in our own actions and words.

VI. Living the Word: In Mouth and in Heart

How, then, do we live into this nearness? Moses says the word is "in your mouth and in your heart." In our heart: we meditate, reflect, internalize, and cherish God's word. It shapes our desires and dreams. In our mouth: we speak, confess, encourage, teach, and proclaim. Our faith is not private alone; it is uttered, sung, shared in the community and the world.

Let us remember that nearness does not mean ease. The journey of faith is sometimes marked by struggle, doubt, and hardship. Yet, the promise remains: God is close, not distant. The Spirit empowers us to choose life, to walk in love, and to dwell in the fullness of God's blessing.

Conclusion: The Word Is Near You

Friends, as we contemplate Deuteronomy 30:9–14, let us rejoice that God's word and will are not far off. By God's grace, the blessings of life, community, and wholeness are within reach. The commandment is not beyond our grasp but is written on our hearts and spoken from our lips.

May we embrace the nearness of God's word. May we, each day, choose life by loving God and loving neighbor. And may we remember, in moments of doubt or confusion, that we do not need to ascend to heaven or cross the sea—for Christ is near, the Spirit is present, and God's word is as close as our own heartbeat.

To God be the glory, now and forever. Amen.