

# Receiving the Guidance of God

Psalm 25

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**Main point:** In a complex world, Yahweh gives guidance to those who humbly obey, fear Him, and patiently wait for His timing.

To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

<sup>2</sup> O my God, in You I trust,  
Do not let me be ashamed;

Do not let my enemies exult over me.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, none of those who wait for You will be ashamed;  
Those who deal treacherously without cause will be ashamed.

<sup>4</sup> Make me know Your ways, O LORD;

Teach me Your paths.

<sup>5</sup> Lead me in Your truth and teach me,

For You are the God of my salvation;

For You I wait all the day.

<sup>6</sup> Remember, O LORD, Your compassion and Your lovingkindnesses,

For they have been from of old.

<sup>7</sup> Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;

According to Your lovingkindness remember me,

For Your goodness' sake, O LORD.

<sup>8</sup> Good and upright is the LORD;

Therefore He instructs sinners in the way.

<sup>9</sup> He leads the humble in justice,

And He teaches the humble His way.

<sup>10</sup> All the paths of the LORD are lovingkindness and truth

To those who keep His covenant and His testimonies.

<sup>11</sup> For Your name's sake, O LORD,

Pardon my iniquity, for it is great.

<sup>12</sup> Who is the man who fears the LORD?

He will instruct him in the way he should choose.

<sup>13</sup> His soul will abide in prosperity,

And his descendants will inherit the land.

<sup>14</sup> The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him,

And He will make them know His covenant.

<sup>15</sup> My eyes are continually toward the LORD,

For He will pluck my feet out of the net.

<sup>16</sup> Turn to me and be gracious to me,

For I am lonely and afflicted.

<sup>17</sup> The troubles of my heart are enlarged;

Bring me out of my distresses.

<sup>18</sup> Look upon my affliction and my trouble,

And forgive all my sins.

<sup>19</sup> Look upon my enemies, for they are many,

And they hate me with violent hatred.

<sup>20</sup> Guard my soul and deliver me;

Do not let me be ashamed, for I take refuge in You.

<sup>21</sup> Let integrity and uprightness preserve me,

For I wait for You.

<sup>22</sup> Redeem Israel, O God,

Out of all his troubles.

**PSALM 25**

## Introduction:

**In Psalm 25, David prays for three things** we can all relate to: 1) *deliverance* (vv.1-3, 16-22), 2) *guidance* (vv.4-5), and 3) *forgiveness* (vv.6-7, 18). Of these three, the central one is that of guidance. As we listen to David's *plea*, we find that he couples his *petition* to God, with a *contemplation* of the character of God—"Good and upright is the Lord" (v.8). In doing so, he finds *confidence* in God that his prayer will be answered. If you try to remember this three-car train, it will help you to track through this wonderful psalm: *petition, contemplation, confidence*. **The theme of Psalm 25 is seeking and discovering the will of God.**

Let me ask you a personal question: Do *your prayers* pass into *contemplation* of the perfect nature of God? Do *your thoughts* of God's moral perfections cause you to break out into confident prayers? To pray to God without thinking about who He is results in a superficial, religious devotion to God. But to combine *prayer* with *contemplation* results in a deeper devotion and *confidence*, which aids us in receiving the guidance of God.

**It is a sign of spiritual health** when a person is asking, "What is the will of God for this particular situation or choice in my life?" However, the guidance which David seeks is not for his own *personal advantage* or *worldly gain*. David is seeking to know God's will. Notice verse 4, he desires to know "**God's ways**." He wants to be taught, "**God's path**." He is eager to be led to walk in "**God's truth**." What David requires is what we need as well: we need *enlightenment* and *strength*. He needs to know *what to do*, and He needs *the power to do it!* Is there anyone who finds themselves in this same need?

**The prayer of Psalm 25 complements the wisdom of Psalm 1.** In Psalm 1, it appears as if the Christian's journey is simply about making the right choice or choosing the right road—and once the choice is made, all will be well. But in comes Psalm 25 to remind us that the *right road is not an easy one to walk*. It is lined with enemies who would love nothing more than to see you fail. It shows us that the Christian is like a traveler who is plagued with internal doubts because of past sins. On the Christian journey, there are troubles from without and within. When we stop for a moment along the way, we know we cannot go back, but sometimes we are not clear about the way forward. Here in this chapter, David teaches us that the road of the Christian is too difficult to walk without the companionship and guidance of God.

So, how do we discover God's will about questions like job choices, family decisions, spending, planning, ministering, and a host of other things? Contrary to what false teachers say, there is no "hotline" to heaven where God is answering every single question about every little thing in life. Generally speaking, the biblical counsel given concerning God's will is that there are two maps that one can examine in seeking to know God's will. In Deuteronomy 29:29, these two maps are identified as **the sovereign will of God** and **the commanded will of God**:

- The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.

The sovereign will of God is spoken of as the "*secret things*," which are known only to God, except as revealed throughout history or revelation (*Jer.29:11*). On the other hand, the commanded will of God 1) *is revealed in the Bible*, 2) *can be resisted or disobeyed*, 3) *involves only that which is good and holy*, 4) *provides principles for living* and, 5) *is something believers are exhorted to know, understand, and obey*. In Psalm 25, David sets before us **FOUR practical PREREQUISITES or CONDITIONS for gaining direction about the will of God**.

## The CIRCUMSTANCES We Face Which Require God's Guidance

Before we consider the CONDITIONS for gaining direction about the will of God, I want you to notice the CIRCUMSTANCES we face, which require God's guidance. For David,

### 1. It was a time of **great PRESSURE** from his enemies and foes. (vv.2-3, 19)

- <sup>2</sup>O my God, in You I trust,  
Do not let me be ashamed;  
Do not let my enemies exult over me.  
<sup>3</sup>Indeed, none of those who wait for You will be ashamed;  
Those who deal treacherously without cause will be ashamed.
- <sup>19</sup>Look upon my enemies, for they are many.  
And they hate me with violent hatred.

Who were David's enemies? Like us, David faced a three-fold enemy of *the world, the flesh, and the devil*. By the world, I mean the world of unbelievers who are opposed to the sovereign rule and authority of God (*James 4:4*). It was not that David disliked lost people, but rather, when he faced the choice of being *for God* or *against Him*, He chose to stand in allegiance and submission to God rather than the world. And that choice put David in a position of great pressure from "*many enemies...who dealt treacherously with him without cause*" (Cf. *Ps.139:21*).

You very well may be the *kindest* and most *thoughtful* and *generous* person on your job, in your school, or in your family, but when you throw your lot in with God, you will face a pressure that requires wisdom to know what action to take. Sometimes, this pressure may come even from those you love most, for Jesus said in Matthew 10:34-36 that His presence would bring a division in the home, and "*a man's enemies will be the members of his household*." The great pressure you experience while following God's will in your life requires guidance as you interact with those who oppose God's will.

David not only faced great pressure,

### 2. It was a time of **great CONCERN** about his past failures and sins. (vv.7, 18)

- <sup>7</sup>Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
- <sup>18</sup>Look upon my affliction and my trouble.  
And forgive all my sins.

David was not a perfect man, and no one listening to me now is. He made some bad choices along the way, and so have you. David was concerned that he was vulnerable to take a wrong turn again. As he looked back to the days of his youth, he could recall when he was so blind and ignorant of the consequence of his rash choices, and those choices haunted him in the middle stretch and last quarter of his life.

Now don't think David did not understand *forgiveness*. He did. True forgiveness always contains three elements. Let me put them in the form of pictures. On the one hand, we can think of **a criminal** who is guilty, his penalty is forgiven, and he is allowed to go free without jail time. On the other hand, true forgiveness is more than *legal pardon*; it looks like what takes place between **a parent and child**. A parent may choose not to punish a child, but the child knows that forgiveness is the love that flows freely from

parent to child and child to parent. There is one last picture that makes the biblical idea of forgiveness complete. It is when our **debts** are canceled, and payment is no longer required. David knew all three of these elements: *punishment averted, love, restored, and debts canceled*—but the film of his past sins and failures was not erased in his mind.

And that remembrance caused him *great concern*. As he thought of how he wandered in the past, he did not want to repeat the same actions. And this is why he needed guidance from God. So do we. David needed guidance because it was a time of great pressure from enemies, great concern about past failures, but David also needed guidance because...

### 3. It was a time of **great LONELINESS** in his distresses and troubles. (vv.16-18)

- <sup>16</sup> Turn to me and be gracious to me,  
For I am lonely and afflicted.  
<sup>17</sup> The troubles of my heart are enlarged;  
Bring me out of my distresses.  
<sup>18</sup> Look upon my affliction and my trouble.

There are some Christians who do not believe that a Christian should ever feel *lonely* because the Lord is with them. Yet, here we find David, the man of God, a man after God's own heart experiencing deep loneliness. There are some listening to me right now in a room with other people, yet you feel lonely in your heart.

You can feel lonely in a crowded room, or even in a marriage or family. Vance Havner once said, "One of the worst things about loneliness is that you can't run away from it." David could not run from it, and neither can you. For loneliness is not an absence of faith or an indicator of immaturity, but rather, it is a real, honest, reality for even the godliest of saints. It is a sign that you are human.

John Milton, the great writer of *Paradise Lost*, reminds us that "Loneliness is the first thing which God's eye named not good." For you recall in Genesis chapter 1, after each day that God fashioned the world, He said, "It was good, it was good, it was good," but when Adam was created and alone, He said, "*it is not good for the man to be alone*" (Gen.2:18). So, he made a helpmate, a weaver, suitable for him.

The good news is that Christ understands loneliness, for He's been through it. Nevertheless, when we are going through some physical, emotional, or mental affliction and distress, we can feel very alone in the trouble. Some of you feel that ache in your heart at this very moment. The question remains: Can God guide me in my distress and loneliness?

What David teaches us in this psalm is that *God can*, and *God will* guide you, but there are four principles, conditions, or prerequisites. Here are **four principles concerning seeking and discovering the will of God** in whatever situation you find yourself in in life.

## The CONDITIONS for Receiving God's Guidance

What is involved in finding the guidance of God? There are four prerequisites for knowing the guidance of God in your life.

### 1. Meekness of spirit (v.9)

<sup>9</sup> He leads the humble in justice,  
And He teaches the humble His way.

Who are the humble? Who are the meek? We discover part of the answer in thinking about the very opposite of meekness, which is *pride*. You know a group of lions is called a *pride* because they are viewed as *invincible*—but in God's eyes, no man or group of men are invincible. A proud person supposes that he already knows enough, and they cannot be taught. A haughty person is one who has no respect for others, and therefore, they cannot learn from them. But a humble or meek person is one who is teachable, prayerful, and willing to submit their will to God's.

Let's sketch out what a humble person who is meek of spirit looks like.

- a. **A meek person is yielded to God's purposes, no matter how mysterious they appear.** If you are having difficulty finding the guidance of God, one of the very first things that you should ask yourself is: am I yielded to the direction that He already gives? *"But God leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way."*
- b. **A meek person is submissive to God's Word, no matter how costly it is.** Now, if you pray, "Lord, I am prepared to do whatever You want as long as it is..." Or, "Lord, I am willing to do whatever You want as long as it doesn't involve..." then you are still trying to control the agenda. But a meek person, who is willing to be submissive to God's Word no matter how costly, can expect to be guided in His way.
- c. **A meek person embraces God's providences, no matter how bitter they taste.** The face of meekness in the Old Testament is not *Job*, *Abraham*, or even *David*. The "poster man" of meekness is *Moses*. In Numbers 12:3, we read, *"Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth."* Moses was no Casper Milquetoast! Here was a man who, by God's grace, led over a million people through a desert for forty years, and some of these sheep were the most rebellious kind there is. Here was a man of *intense spiritual energy, strength, and vision*, and yet it was not ascribed to *superior intelligence* or his *privileged upbringing*. Moses' success was attributed to *his meekness*—his willingness to yield to God's purposes, submit to God's Word, and embrace God's providences no matter how bitter they taste.

But even the great *Moses* was superseded by *the Lord Jesus Christ*. In fact, the only characteristic that Jesus ever drew attention to was His meekness.

- **Matthew 11:28-29**—Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart.

I was praying for light on how this gentleness and humility looked in the life of the Lord Jesus. And my old friend, J.C. Ryle reminded me that "Mary and Martha at Bethany, Peter after his fall, the disciples after the resurrection, Thomas after his cold unbelief, all tasted of the 'meekness and gentleness of Christ.'"

The greatest display of His meekness is seen in that He humbled Himself voluntarily to the depth of unfathomable humiliation to die for sinners (*Cf. Phil.2:5-11*). If we are to know the guidance of God, we must be willing to *yield to God's purposes no matter how mysterious, submit to God's Word no matter how costly, and embrace God's providence no matter how bitter.*

## 2. Obedience of heart (v.10)

<sup>10</sup> All the paths of the LORD are lovingkindness and truth  
To those who keep His covenant and His testimonies.

"**All of the paths of the Lord**"—that is to say, *all that the Lord commands, all His dealings with His creatures, are or will be found to be in the direction of committed love and truth.* But this is "**to those who keep His covenant,**" which is to say, "to those who obey His law and His testimonies (the witness that God pronounces to be true of Himself in His Word)."

Sinclair Ferguson points out that one of the words frequently used for obedience in the Old Testament is a compound Greek verb, which literally means "to hear underneath." That is what David is speaking of here. *To keep His covenant and testimonies means having a willingness to place my will in a subordinate position to His will.*

**This is how it works.** As we take God's Word or law and apply them to every aspect of life, we discover that His revealed written Word directs our paths now and leads us into all that is faithful and true. Jeremiah put it this way,

- **Jeremiah 6:16**—Thus says the LORD,  
Stand by [*station yourself, pause while, investigate, inquire*] the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths,  
Where the good way is [*the way of God's blessing*], and walk in it [*practice*];  
And you will find rest for your souls [*even amid earthly difficult paths*].  
But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'

Here it seems that Jeremiah agrees with David in revealing to us that the most important thing is not having the Bible on your shelf or table, but having the Word of God in your mind and heart and being ready to practice it when the occasion arises. Now, this requires a third prerequisite.

- First, we need a meekness of spirit that yields to God's providence.
- Second, we need an obedience of heart that follows God's Word.

### 3. Reverence for God's glory (vv.12, 14)

<sup>12</sup> Who is the man who fears the LORD?

He will instruct him in the way he should choose.

<sup>14</sup> The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him,

And He will make them know His covenant.

The question in verse 12 is intended to include every believer for all time. Notice how David moves from the singular in verse 12, "Who is the man who fears the Lord?" to the plural in verse 14, "the secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him." In other words, wherever one is found who has the character referred to here, whoever he/she may be, God will instruct him in the way he should choose.

The key then to receiving God's guidance is this reverential awe or the fear of the Lord. What is the fear of the Lord?

- **Psalm 111:10**—The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;  
A good understanding have all those who do *His commandments*;  
His praise endures forever.
- **Proverbs 1:7**—The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;  
Fools despise wisdom and instruction.
- **Proverbs 8:13**—The fear of the LORD is to hate evil;  
Pride and arrogance and the evil way  
And the perverted mouth, I hate.
- **Proverbs 9:10**—The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,  
And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

These verses provide the outline or silhouette of the fear of God, but David brings us into the picture and shows us how it looks in rich, vivid colors. He says it is like a friend who confides in another friend. He takes his friend into his confidence and reveals His secret intention. Is this not what Jesus demonstrated for us in John 15?

- **John 15:13-15**—Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> You are My friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup> No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.
- **Proverbs 3:32**—For the devious are an abomination to the LORD;  
But He is intimate with the upright.

What David is saying is that those who have come into His family, whose sins have been forgiven, those who know the electricity of His love and grace, "*He will make them know His covenant.*" In other words, God takes a very personal approach and will enable them to understand the gracious provisions in His Word and all that is needed to promote their happiness and salvation.

What is it that makes best friends, best friends? The answer is that they have *no secrets between them.* And what David is saying here is that those who are the friends of God, God Himself divulges His secret counsel.

If we are to receive the guidance of God, then we need:

1. Meekness of spirit.
2. Obedience of heart.
3. Reverence for God's glory.

#### **4. Patience to wait (vv.3, 5, 21)**

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, none of those who wait for You will be ashamed;

<sup>5</sup> Lead me in Your truth and teach me,  
For You are the God of my salvation;  
For You I wait all the day.

<sup>21</sup> Let integrity and uprightness preserve me,  
For I wait for You.

Now, what are we waiting for? We need patience to wait for *God's perfect positioning*. Everything in our culture has programmed us to want what we want and to want it NOW. The watchword with respect to guidance is the word "wait." This is not something new or hidden; it is as clear and old as the words of Isaiah.

- Do you want to exchange your weakness for His strength?
- Do you desire to get the enabling grace that you so desperately need today?
- Do you yearn for power to run for the moment?
- Or to walk in the normal course of life?

Then God says in Isaiah 40:29-31, it will be given to those who meet a certain prerequisite.

- <sup>29</sup> He gives strength to the weary,  
And to *him who* lacks might He increases power.  
<sup>30</sup> Though youths grow weary and tired,  
And vigorous young men stumble badly,  
<sup>31</sup> Yet those who wait for the LORD  
Will gain new strength;  
They will mount up *with* wings like eagles,  
They will run and not get tired,  
They will walk and not become weary.

**Why does God make us wait?** Dr. Sinclair Ferguson puts it this way,

"Reason number one, *God's situation is not ready for you*, or very likely reason number two, *you are not ready for God's situation.*"



So, when God calls us to *wait*, He is not only *showing mercy to us*, but He is *creating* and shaping in us *the kind of character that looks like His Son*. Jesus said to His disciples in John 16:12,

- I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth [*the One who knows all truth that is to be known*] comes, He will guide you [*not all believers in general, but the Apostles in particular*] into all the truth [*so that there is no need for further revelation*]; for He will now speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.

We want our problems solved immediately. But at the end of the day, God is far more interested in what we are becoming as believers than in what we do as individuals. He is getting us ready.

Alexander Maclaren once said, "The better a man is, the more clearly he sees, and the more deeply he feels, his own badness. If a shoe is all covered with mud, a splash or two of water will make no difference. But if it be polished and clean, one speck shows. The less sin a man has, the more obvious it is, and the more he has, the less he generally knows it."<sup>1</sup>

What do you see? Does your heart cry out and plead for God's guidance like David?

1. The first step involves a meekness of spirit.
2. The second step involves an obedience of heart.
3. The third step involves a reverence of soul.
4. The fourth step involves a patience of life.

## **Conclusion:**

All of us fall short of these prerequisites at one point or another. No one keeps them perfectly. If God's response depends on our *sinlessness*, we will remain without guidance and aid. If God's response depends upon *His faithfulness* to those joined to Him in the New Covenant, then we can be assured that He will guide us and help us in every aspect of life.

The good news is that God has provided a *Redeemer*, a next of kin, whose right it is to take upon Himself, the burden (whatever it may be) of His kinsman. And He paid the price to affect our deliverance and guidance. All is done and paid for. Now it is up to us to open our hand by faith and receive what He has purchased and provided.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions in Holy Scripture*, p. 115