

Walking with God in Dark Days

Psalm 25

Michael Felkins

Grand Avenue Baptist Church

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What do you do when hardships, adversity, trouble, and suffering catch you by surprise and simply leave you lying flat on your back? When we are weakened and distressed by the unexpected, the unplanned, and the unwanted, we are susceptible to listening to the lies of the enemy. One of these lies might be that we have singled out for this particular suffering. This is the lie that God has favorites, and you are not one of them. Another lie may come in the form of a question: *"Where is your God?"* This is the lie that God has abandoned us and doesn't keep His promises.

Friends, in our moments of weakness, the enemy seeks to make us doubt the Lord's love, goodness, and covenant faithfulness. The enemy knows that when we begin to doubt God's goodness, we stop going to Him for help, because we seek help only from someone whom we know we can trust. If we doubt the love of God, then we won't follow Him by faith.

The Bible is honest about the dangers, hardships, and the trials of life. It teaches us that we live in a world broken by sin. Over and over, the Bible shows us the struggles of people like you and me. Scripture doesn't give us a sanitized depiction of life, one free of disappointments and hardships. The Bible assures us that God sees, knows, understands, and cares about what we are going through. He reminds us that His promises do not depict some unreal world in which none of us live. Instead, He gives us hope in the middle of real world of hardship.¹ Psalm 25 provides us with a template for living life by faith in God and walking with Him in the dark days when we struggle to understand and even survive the day ahead. Before we get into Psalm 25, let me give you some background on this Psalm.

Psalm 25 and the next several Psalms are prayers of King David that he wrote at particular seasons of his life. When David wrote Psalm 25, he wrote it as an acrostic Psalm. This means that each line begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. We might call this prayer in Psalm 25 the A-to-Z of walking with God in the dark days of tribulation.

Also, Psalm 25 is considered a companion Psalm to Psalm 1. So, if Psalm 1 teaches us how to walk in the way of the righteous, then Psalm 25 models how to pray as we seek to live by faith and walk in the way of the righteous in dark, difficult days.

One more observation about Psalm 25 is that it is written in classic circular Hebrew literary fashion. It lays out an idea, then moves on to another idea, only to return to the previous idea a few verses later. This is also considered literary amplification of the topics addressed in the Psalm.

My point is that it would be easy to group the topics in this Psalm and cover each one as its own application point. However, if we do this, we miss the spirit and movement of the Psalm. When King David wrote Psalm 25 he wrote it in a way that reflects how our hearts work when we are struggling. We want to trust God; we pray and ask for guidance and forgiveness, only to be so overwhelmed that we begin the process all over again, so that our prayer is amplified with more pain, concern, and perhaps even anxiety. We will keep talking about things we have already talked about and revisit topics we thought we laid to rest.

The big idea of Psalm 25 is: *Those who trust the Lord may diligently pray for guidance, forgiveness, and deliverance so that they find hope in the dark days.* This Psalm will teach us how to pray and press into the grace and mercy of God in those dark, difficult days. I have six points to help us apply Psalm 25.

¹ Paul Tripp, *Everyday Gospel*, June 11, p. 202 in which.

I. Trust in the LORD in Dark Days (vv. 1-3)

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. ² O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me. ³ Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

David begins his prayer saying, “To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.” He doesn’t begin his prayer with a request, but with *surrender*. To *lift up one’s soul* is to place one’s whole life before God in complete surrender of one’s heart, one’s fears, one’s future, and one’s reputation.

Psalms 25 is the true prayer of the King. It is the prayer of the one who has taken hold of God’s covenant in Jesus Christ. It is not some generalized spirituality but specific and grounded in God’s covenant with His people. As we work through this Psalm, we will realize it is filled with covenant language.

We will hear this covenant language in the covenant name of God that is used nine times in this Psalm. We will also hear it in words like: *Mercy* (v. 6), *Steadfast love* (vv. 6, 10), *Goodness* (vv. 7, 8, 13), *Upright* (v. 8), *Faithfulness* (v. 10), and the word *covenant* itself (vv. 10, 14).

While the redemptive thread of the covenant is woven throughout the tapestry of this Psalm, the heart of David’s concern in these first three verses is the *fear* of being put to *shame*. The idea of *shame* is repeated three times in the first three verses. In Scripture, *shame* is not mere embarrassment; it is the fear that trusting God might prove foolish. So, David prays that his hope will not collapse under the pressure of his afflictions.

To help him persevere, he reminds himself to trust God and that those who trust God will not be put to shame. Listen to v. 3 again:

Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame.

When you think about it, David’s fears are our fears too. We all wonder at times how God could love us and put up with sinners like us. Then, we feel the pressure of the world working against us. Then, there may be people who hate us because we follow Jesus. Finally, we have an enemy in the devil who prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. When you take it all together, you and I might fear collapsing under the pressure of it all.

However, v. 3 is our great hope:

Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame.

The “you” in v. 3 points us to Jesus, the True King. He trusted the Father perfectly and was never put to shame. Where Israel failed, and David stumbled in his faith, Jesus succeeded. Jesus is the victorious covenant-keeping Son. He went through the storms of affliction and did not collapse. He was mocked, rejected, and crucified, and yet He completely trusted the LORD in His dark days. God vindicated Him by raising Him from the dead (Acts 2:24–36). By His resurrection, the victory was won, and shame was destroyed.

How are you waiting on Jesus today in your dark days? How are you trusting Him? Before you ask God to change the difficult trial that you are going through, perhaps you should ask whether you have completely entrusted your whole being to Jesus. Have you “*lifted up your soul*” to Christ?

Our second application point is to *seek the LORD for guidance in dark days*. First, we *trust in the LORD*; second, we *seek the LORD for guidance*.

II. Seek the LORD for Guidance in Dark Days (vv. 4-5)

Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. ⁵ Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.

Verses 4-5 apply the instruction of Psalm 1 to walking in the path of the righteous in dark days. Notice how David prayed. The first thing he asked for was not *relief*, but *instruction*. How many of us pray this way? Often, we want relief before we want instruction from the LORD, don’t we? David recognized a crucial truth: Guidance is not automatic. It only comes to those who will humbly surrender to the LORD. Bottom line: God teaches those who are willing to learn.

I want you to notice the repetition of phrases that request instruction in his prayer. He prayed: *"Make me know," "Teach me,"* and *"Lead me."* These are excellent prayers. I often ask the LORD to *"make me know"* what He is trying to teach me because I know how hard my heart is, so I want God to *"make me know."*

Here's the thing about the LORD's instruction. We can't pretend we are waiting on the LORD if we don't want to do what He teaches us to do. Here's how Jesus says it in Luke 6:46-49,

"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? ⁴⁷ Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: ⁴⁸ he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. ⁴⁹ But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great."

The question is: Are you seeking guidance from the LORD in your dark days? God guides those who humbly seek Him and His instructions. Are you asking the LORD to bless your plans OR to teach you how to walk in the path of righteousness? Are you asking the LORD to change your circumstances OR to teach you how to live in the darkness of your difficulty?

As we seek guidance from the LORD, we need to remember to look to our Savior, who doesn't merely *"show us the way"* but Who is *"the Way."* Jesus doesn't merely *"show us the path of the righteous;"* He is *"the path of the righteous."* This is why it is so very, very important to learn to look to Jesus. We learn from Him by meditating on His perfect life and His words, and then, by His Spirit, He guides us in dark days.

Here's the principle for us: *The bridge between what "I know to be true" and "what I know I should do" is "meditation" on the person, work, and word of Christ.* So, as I meditate on the person of Christ, His atoning work on my behalf, and study His word, I learn the truth, and by His Spirit He instructs me on what to do. This is how the LORD teaches us and guides us.

So, we trust the LORD, seek Him for guidance, and now we seek His mercy in our dark days.

III. Seek the LORD for Mercy in Dark Days (vv. 6-7)

Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

King David not only seeks instruction from the LORD, but He also seeks the mercy of God because he knows he is a sinner. Even if we turn over a new leaf in life and begin to follow the LORD, we still have a sin problem. We have sinned in the past, and we will sin in the future.

So, David seeks the covenant mercy of God. When you read these two verses, there are *six references* that ground God's mercy of forgiveness in His *covenant love* for His people. The point is, David, doesn't assume forgiveness comes out of thin air or because God is love, but it is grounded in God's covenant of love, justice, and mercy that is ultimately fulfilled when Jesus died on the cross to purchase our pardon for sin, guilt, and shame. So, our forgiveness is grounded in Christ's work on the cross.

Then in v. 7, David prays:

Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!

David wants to forget the sins of his youth. King David probably wrote this Psalm near the end of his life. So, it's not the prayer of an immature man or some boy who's just learning how to shave. David has come to know his heart over the years of his life. He knows the sin he was capable of committing.

We don't know what sins he is referring to, but he most likely had some besetting sins as a youth that he still struggled with as an older man. He wants the LORD not to remember the sins of his youth.

We are no different. I've met men who were exposed to pornography as a child or youth, and they continue to struggle today. They may have some measure of victory, but the sins of their youth follow them. Perhaps you were sexually promiscuous as a teenager or young adult, and the memories of past sins still haunt your heart and mind. I don't know what sin of your youth you may still struggle with, but most of us have them, and we would love nothing more than to have our memories wiped clean so that they do not come to our minds and condemn us in the present. May the LORD be merciful to us and give us freedom from the memories of the sins of our youth. Why should we remember what God has so mercifully forgotten? We shouldn't be able to see those sins because they are covered in the blood of Christ that was shed to pay for them. Yet because of the consequences of our sin, we will still struggle sometimes.

Let's think about vv. 6-7 this way. Let's consider how these two verses are warnings for our young adults, college students, youth, and children. Listen to the words of the nineteenth-century pastor, Charles Spurgeon. He writes:

*The world winks at the sins of young men . . . yet they are not so little after all; the bones of our youthful feastings as Satan's table will stick painfully in our throats when we are old men.*²

With similar words, theologian David Dickson writes:

*New afflictions may easily renew the sense of old sins, even from the time of youth, albeit [they are] forgiven [by] God, and forgotten by the believer, [yet] the tempter can make use [of those past sins] in the day of trouble.*³

So, let's take sin very seriously, especially the sins of our youth. While David is confident that the LORD didn't remember the sins of his youth and that God's mercy covered his sin, David knew we have an enemy who will continually throw our past sins back in our faces.

Here's the good news of the gospel. At the cross, God answered this prayer decisively. The sins of God's people were laid upon Christ, and He bore them fully (Isaiah 53:5-6; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Because of Christ, God remembers our sins no more.

So, brothers and sisters, if you are struggling with the sins of your youth, please preach the gospel to yourself and know that you have received the grace of God's forgetfulness. May you not remember what God has forgotten. May the rich mercy of God wash your conscience clean with the blood of Jesus, the water of the word, and the Spirit of God.

Now, we move from *seeking the LORD's mercy* to *seeking the LORD for instruction in our dark days*.

IV. Seek the LORD for Instruction in Dark Days (vv. 8-10)

Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. ⁹ He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. ¹⁰ All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

In these verses, David revisits what he talked about in vv. 4-5. Remember, the very flow of this Psalm reflects the struggling heart, doesn't it? Our hearts often bounce around in dark days, don't they? We move from one thing to another, then come back and rehash something we had just worked through and even prayed over. But, there we go, rehashing a topic and doubling down on prayer. Well, with this in mind let's unpack vv. 8-10. Look v. 8:

Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

² Christopher Ash, *The Psalms: A Christ-Centered Commentary*, Vol. 2, *Psalms 1-50*, 297.

³ Ibid.

Friends, here is the good news of the gospel—the goodness of God does not exclude sinners; it invites them to come into His presence through the shed blood of Christ. God teaches sinners who will admit their sin and listen to Him. He will not abandon sinners who repent of their sins. This means there is hope for you and me.

Then vv. 9-10 reveal the pattern of how we are instructed. The humble are taught, and the meek are guided. Friends, God welcomes sinners, and He draws near to the teachable precisely because He is good. God is so good that He reclaims sinful men and women. He makes us into what we should be. If we will listen to instruction from His word and Spirit, He will teach us.

Friends, vv. 8-10 points us to Jesus, who perfectly embodies the goodness and uprightness of God. As the incarnate Word (John 1:14), He reveals the glorious character of God. In Christ, God's covenant faithfulness is no longer promised—it is personified. To know Christ is to know the faithful God of Psalm 25.

Friends, God's guidance flows from His goodness, and those who humble themselves before Him will receive His good guidance in the dark days of life. To humble yourself before Him is to press pause on the chaos in your life, get on your knees, confess your sin, and ask God to help you to obey the good instructions He gives you through His word, His Spirit, and the godly people He puts in your life through your church and family.

Next, we rejoice in the forgiveness of our sin

V. Rejoice in the Forgiveness of Sin (vv. 11-15)

Again, we hear David return to his need for forgiveness of his sin. He had previously addressed this in vv. 6-7, but he now returns to his need of forgiveness. First, look at v. 11:

For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great.

David does two things in v. 11. First, he didn't minimize his sin; second, he magnified God's name as the basis for the forgiveness of his sin. Friends, God forgives not because sin is small, but because His glory is great and His glory is most magnified in the death of Christ on the cross to pay for the sins of His people.

Next, vv. 12-14 seem like an abrupt shift in the Psalm, as David moves from forgiveness of sin to fearing the Lord. Listen to vv. 12-15:

Who is the man who fears the LORD? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose. ¹³ His soul shall abide in well-being, and his offspring shall inherit the land. ¹⁴ The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant. ¹⁵ My eyes are ever toward the LORD, for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

So, how does David move from the forgiveness of our sin to the importance of fearing the LORD? Bottom line: The power of God is a fearsome thing.

Think about it this way: When the disciples were about to sink in a storm on the Sea of Galilee, they cried out to Jesus, and He stood up in the boat and commanded the storm, "*Peace! Be still!*" Immediately, the wind stopped, and the sea was calm. When the disciples saw His power, they were terrified.

When you think about it, God's forgiveness is a fearsome thing. It is a fearsome thing because the forgiveness Christ purchased at the cross stilled the storm of God's wrath that was raging against us. It was stilled because Jesus took the full force of that storm on the cross. The storm of God's wrath against sin is greater than some meteorological event on the Sea of Galilee.

Through the person and work of Christ, God quiets the wind and waves of guilt and shame in our hearts. Friends, nothing can bring peace to our troubled conscience that results in a sense of awe in us than when we realize that we have experienced the incredible power of God to still the storm in our hearts and minds.⁴

The question is: Where are your eyes fixed as the storms of the heart close in on you? Are you abiding in the person and work of Christ on your behalf, or are *your eyes fixed* on the guilt and shame? Are you pressing into

⁴ James Johnston, *Preaching the Word: Psalms, Vol. 1, Psalm 1-41*, 268.

the intimate friendship you now have with the LORD through union with Jesus, or are you picking the scab of your sin and wallowing in despair?

Friendship with the LORD means He will give you His intimate counsel when the dark days of trouble close in on you. It means that you can walk with God by faith, with your eyes fixed on Jesus, knowing that because of the joy that was set before Him, He endured the shame of the cross on your behalf to set you free from your sin so that you may enjoy sweet fellowship with Him. So, where are your eyes fixed when trouble closes in?

VI. Cry Out to the LORD in Your Distress (vv. 16-22)

Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. ¹⁷ The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses. ¹⁸ Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins. ¹⁹ Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me.

When we read vv. 16-19, it is like David never wrote vv. 1-15. Where did that David go, and who is this David that just wrote vv. 16-19 because they seem like two different people.

Remember what I told you earlier, that the structure of this Psalm will vacillate between confidence in the LORD and the anxieties of life. This is the way our hearts often work. One minute, we are confident the LORD is with us, and the next, it seems we can't see because of the darkness that surrounds us. It seems we can't fix our eyes on Jesus because we just can't see past our own noses.

As we consider vv. 16-19, we should be reminded of David's desire to trust God as he began writing this prayer. He lifted his soul up to the LORD, but his concern was that God not leave him hanging out to dry and be put to shame. Now, at the end of Psalm 25, he returns to his fear of being afflicted, lonely, with the trouble in his heart overwhelming him, because his sin is so great. He fears the LORD will leave him in the hands of his enemies, and he will be put to shame.

Yet, he closes his prayer of lament with confidence that the LORD will not abandon him and will redeem His people. Look in vv. 20-22:

Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me! Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. ²¹ May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you. ²² Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.

Brothers and sisters, we can be confident that God will not abandon us in our darkest day because God came in Christ Jesus and entered fully into human distress as the suffering servant and obedient Son. He experienced the covenant curse, exile, and was forsaken on the cross so that we may live in union with God through Christ. So, when we cry out in our distress, cry out in confidence because Jesus has overcome world and is with you.

Conclusion: As we close, I want to circle back to v. 13 that says the soul of the man who fears the LORD, "*shall abide in well-being.*" The word "*abide*" in v. 13 literally means to spend the night in restful sleep. So, here is what Psalm 25 is asking: *How do you get to a place where your soul, no matter what storms are raging in and around your heart, is as calm as if you have just settled down for a good night's rest?*

How do you get to this point in your walk with God? What does David do when adversities, afflictions, and the dark days wash over his life? He doesn't apply a different solution to each adversity or affliction. Instead, he turns to the one source of healing for all of the trials that come in the dark days. Verse 1 says, "*To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.*" Then, in v. 20, he says, "*I take refuge in you.*" He doesn't address adversity by asking God to change his circumstances. Instead, he does the only thing he can do and should do – he casts himself on the LORD.⁵

I love what Dane Ortland says about Psalm 25. Let me close with his words:

⁵ Dane C. Ortland, *In the LORD I Take Refuge, 150 Daily Devotions through the Psalms*, 70.

When life overwhelms us, when the bottom is falling out, this is where Scripture takes us: to God. We do not achieve internal calm by securing external calm. We find internal calm by looking to God.⁶

Friends, as the storm rages in your heart and life and the dark days seem like they will never end, where are your eyes looking?

⁶ Ibid.