

# A MASTERCLASS

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A 'master class' is the term given for a class taught by someone who has expert knowledge or skill in a particular area, especially in music.<sup>1</sup> Historically, these special courses weren't available to the wider public but now, thanks to the convenience and power of the internet, any of us can listen in on lectures from world class instructors. For example, you can visit [masterclass.com](https://www.masterclass.com), pay your fee, and sit under the teaching of the foremost authorities in a variety of subjects. Learn cooking from Wolfgang Puck, photography from Annie Leibovitz, ball-handling and shooting from Steph Curry. While I doubt all the masters on the site have a gift for teaching, each of them definitely has something to say that is worth listening to and taking to heart.

The 76 Psalms of David are like a magnificent master class, taught by one of history's great champions. His lectures come to us in the form of poetry and prayer and music, but he discusses topics far and wide. He's not stuck in the sanctuary, he takes us from womb to tomb. And, most importantly, David teaches us about how a real Christian faith operates in the day-to-day experience of this life. He speaks these truths not only under holy inspiration, but also from his wealth of experience. David is able to speak firsthand as a leader in the field of spiritual life.

This is information we all can learn from and should return to regularly, especially when we are struggling with understanding our circumstances or realizing the will of God for our lives. Dr. J. Vernon McGee wrote: *"There are so many people today who are just question marks as far as their Christian lives are concerned. They don't understand this or that verse of Scripture, and they don't understand why God does certain things...[David's words] speak to our hearts today. What was good for the saints of the past and will be good for the saints of the future is also good for us."*<sup>2</sup>

So, we're going to spend some time enrolled in David's master class. Today's lecture is out of Psalm 25. We're not given the specific historical context, but David was in a time of great distress and discouragement. He was facing traitors around him and felt defeated by the traitor *within* his own heart. He was going through some dark days. But, as is so frequent in David's songs, God's glory and grace shine through the dark clouds, giving David an anchor and shield and hope in the waiting.

He begins in verse 1.

**Psalm 25:1-2 - <sup>1</sup>To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul. <sup>2</sup>O my God, I trust in You; Let me not be ashamed; Let not my enemies triumph over me.**

David is an expert example for us when it comes to soul-care and pursuing God. In this opening he demonstrates at least 2 important truths: First, being a child of God does *not* mean we won't have doubts or discouragements or difficulties. David is very open in his songs about the intense despair he would sometimes struggle with and the dangers he faced day in and day out. Any suggestion that the Christian life is supposed to be a perfect facade of porcelain, where everything is awesome all the time, well it just isn't Biblical. But David demonstrates a second (and more important) truth here: When our soul is cast down, the thing to do is *lift it up to the **Lover** of our Soul*, not just stay down in the wallows. We *have* the equipment necessary to take charge of our soul and our minds and let the mind of Christ be in us. That's the power of God alive in us. And here we see it's what David is

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<sup>1</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/masterclass>

<sup>2</sup> J. Vernon McGee *Psalms Volume I*

doing. In his hour of anguish, he *makes the choice* to control his thoughts and go to prayer and remember the greatness of God because he *recognized* that all of these issues had a spiritual solution. His temporal life may have been causing him to question, but he knew that heaven was where the answer would be found.

**Psalm 25:3 - <sup>3</sup>Indeed, let no one who waits on You be ashamed; Let those be ashamed who deal treacherously without cause.**

For David there is always an immense difference between those who belong to God and those who don't. Their character, the trajectory of their lives, their end results could not be more different. David's feeling was that you could spot a child of God a mile away. And, let's always take note, David didn't class himself above other, 'regular old' believers. He's saying, "This is *all* of us who believe. We are *one* category, those who do *not* believe are a completely *separate* category and there's no mistaking one group for the other." Reading David's assessment of the world should make us stop and at least ask ourselves how different we really are from the unbelieving world. Is there *really* a difference in our behavior or outlook or expectation? There was for David and he had absolutely no interest in being a part of the other group. He was determined and dedicated to being a follower of God, though he admits here that those who believe are going to have to be people who *wait*. It's interesting, when we read David's prayers we see that he was frequently in need of a quick fix, but he's also someone in the Scriptures who understood that God isn't usually in the quick-fix business. And so, he became an expert in patience and waiting and enduring in life.

Endurance is a necessary ingredient for the Christian life. Charles Spurgeon once wrote:

*"Ah, dear friends, to stand bravely for Christ for a week or two, is a simple matter; but to keep on month after month, and year after year, is another affair! It is the length of life that tries the reality of religion."*

We get a hint here in verse 3 of the pressures David may have been dealing with. Maybe he had a traitor in the camp or whispers of a rebellion growing under his nose. His response was to *wait* on the Lord in faith. That word *wait* is a great word. It means *to bind together* or *gather together*. That's the kind of waiting a Christian gets to experience. Not just *holding on*, hoping not to lose our grip, but to *bind ourselves up* with the Lord and we can gather together, like we are tonight, to do that. And as we do that, the Scriptures promise that we will not be ashamed. We won't be disappointed.

**Psalm 25:4-5 - <sup>4</sup>Show me 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; On You I wait all the day.**

Show me, teach me, lead me. David not only wants an *experience* with God, he wants to become ***experienced*** with God's will. He's looking for a master class of his own in the ways of God, the paths of God and the truth of God. David is *very* interested in the boundaries and markers of God's narrow road. He *wanted* to be hemmed in by the will of God because he knew firsthand what it was like to be *outside* of God's will.

This past week I re-read *The Hobbit* for the first time in a long time. And there's a section of the journey where they have to travel through the dangerous Mirkwood forest. Now, Bilbo and company are given very clear instructions about how to get from one side to the other. There's a clear path that's protected and marked out, and they're told again and again, "*Do not* leave the path under *any* circumstances." But, as the days press on, the travelers get weary. They start losing hope, getting

impatient. So, finally, rather than keep to the path, they take a vote and decide that in *this* circumstance, they should leave the road and try to find their own way out. They figure, “We’ll go together. Nothing will go wrong. We’ll find our way back any time we want.” And, if you know the story, they fall headlong into disaster after disaster as a result, barely escaping with their lives.

Here, David comes before the Lord in great humility and says, “Lord, I *only* want to go your way. Show me. Teach me. Lead me.” Which clues us in that *even wise men* must have God’s will *revealed* to them. And even mature Christians have more to learn and, no matter how much progress we’ve made, every day is a day to be *led* by God according to His plan and purposes.

Now here’s something that really caught my attention and made me want to look at this passage for our study tonight: David says, “On You I wait all the day.” That requires a *lot* of patience and self-control. The thing about David is that he was not always very good at self control. Some of the major failures in his life or near-failures were due to rash actions and lapses of self-control. So how can he say this in verse 5?

David is a vivid example for us of what happens when a person will walk with God. He wasn’t perfect. Far from it. But when he walked with God, *impossible* fruit was produced in his life by the Holy Spirit. The same man who flew off the handle in violent anger toward Nabal and set out to kill him and a bunch of innocent people was the *same man* who, when walking with God, could show the kind of Godly patience and self-control we see in the cave with Saul at his mercy. It’s not David’s doing, it’s *God’s* doing in the life of someone who is obedient to Him and bound to Him. If it was just *David* accomplishing this patience and this self-control, then Bathsheba wouldn’t have happened. But when a person walks with God and fixes their eyes on the Lord and decides to be led and taught what *God* wants for their lives, then that person is transformed by the power of God and bears all sorts of incredible, spiritual fruit.

I think our tendency is to see the characteristics of spiritual life in the Bible, the lists of the fruit of the Spirit for example, and we tend to think, “Ok, I need to *do* those things in order to be a good Christian.” But David had figured out (as we’ll see in a moment) *there’s nothing good in me!* I can’t *generate* Godliness! Instead he had discovered the secret to rich, abundant fellowship with God is not *working*, it’s *waiting*. If you asked David after class what the secret to a vibrant relationship with God is he’d say what he’s already said here: Bind yourself up with God! Be teachable. Expect God to direct you and grow you, even if you’ve been on this trip for a long, long time. And, whatever we do, we must not leave the path, which means we must not remove ourselves from the boundaries of God’s will, because, as David also knew firsthand, only disaster waits outside the markers. There’s no truth out there, only lies and shame and destruction.

**Psalm 25:6 - <sup>6</sup>Remember, O Lord, Your tender mercies and Your lovingkindnesses, For they are from of old.**

You know, *we’re* the ones that need the reminder of how loving and gracious God is. He hasn’t forgotten. It’s *who He is!* David says there that God’s kind and tender grace toward us are ‘from of old’. Meaning that they’re not just some new look God is trying out. He didn’t rebrand as the kinder, gentler Deity to see how that might help His poll numbers. God *IS* love, not just in a generic sense, but toward *you*. And David always characterizes it as a caring, personal, affectionate love.

Sometimes you’ll hear people talk, usually about their dads, and they’ll say something like, “He loved me the best way he knew how.” We understand what that means. But what it means was that

the love was *lacking* in tenderness and closeness. But that's not how God loves us. He loves us better than the best father. With an *unfailing, loyal, compassionate* love. Lovingkindnesses here means a deep awareness and sympathy for us. This is the way God relates to us *forever!* And, again, *He* doesn't need reminding of this, *we* do. So, next time you're faced with discouragement or difficulty or defeat, *you* remember the kind of love with which God loves you.

We'll close our time tonight with verse 7:

**Psalm 25:7 - <sup>7</sup>Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; According to Your mercy remember me, For Your goodness' sake, O Lord.**

There weren't only enemies *outside* David's palace walls...there was a traitor in his heart too. He had spent time reveling in the greatness of God's kind mercy, but that made him realize his great *need* of forgiveness. And so now in his prayer he says, "Lord, when You look at me, please forget about what I've done and just see Your own goodness and grace!" That's all he appeals to. For *goodness'* sake.

David here exposes the absurdity of self-righteousness. He had *nothing* to merit God's favor. He had no value within himself that would commend himself to God. In fact, he knew that the more God looked at him, the more tarnish and rot would be found. David, the man after God's own heart. David, the slayer of giants and the anointed king and the man with whom God made a unique covenant. But again and again in his master class lectures he tells us, "Without mercy, I'm lost!"

But notice also that David was sure that God could, in one fell swoop, wipe him clean. By the power of His saving grace He could, in a moment, carry away *all* that transgression and *all* David's iniquity, and *that's* what David counted on. Not his own achievements or greatness or popularity or importance. It was God's nature and character of grace that David rested his soul upon. So he could come into the presence of this kindly God and drop all of his sin and imperfection right there at His feet and David, though he was humble and ashamed of his sin, he knew he could leave it there and that God would take care of everything. And David realized that a God who could deal with *that* could also deal with day-to-day difficulties and long-term direction for our lives.

In David's master class lectures the baseline ideas about God are that He is gracious and kind and compassionate and merciful *and* that He has power to save. That's our God. A God who doesn't just love us generically or out of obligation, but He loves us with a *personal*, affectionate love. A bind-us-up-together kind of love. A love that listens and hears and sympathizes *and* has much to show us and teach us and lead us in, no matter where we find ourselves today.

David knew this. He called God the God of *my* salvation in verse 5. Not just salvation in some abstract sense, but *mine*. He's *my* God who has made me *His* own. These are the truths David had revealed to him and that he had experienced in his own life. Now, he wants all of us to see and learn and experience this kind of good walk with the Lord. Not living as spiritual question marks, but as exclamation points. Master students, being taught by our Master Teacher.