

Psalms 25:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths.

Analysis

Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. This verse expresses the heart cry of a seeker who recognizes that knowing God's ways requires divine revelation and instruction. The parallel structure uses two synonymous requests that reinforce each other, a common feature in Hebrew poetry.

"Shew me" (hodi'eni, הָדַעַתִּי) comes from yada (יְعַד), meaning to know—but in causative form: "cause me to know," "make me know," "reveal to me." This acknowledges that God's ways are not self-evident or discoverable through human wisdom alone. They must be revealed by God Himself. This contrasts sharply with human pride that assumes we can figure out life's path independently.

"Thy ways" (derakeyka, דְּרָכֶיךָ) refers to God's characteristic patterns of action, His methods, His manner of working in the world and in human lives. This includes His moral standards, His providential guidance, and His general approach to relating with His creation. Understanding God's ways enables alignment with His purposes.

"Teach me" (lammedeni, לִמְדָתִי) comes from lamad (לִמְדָה), to learn, teach, instruct. The intensive form emphasizes thorough instruction, not casual information. This is the vocabulary of discipleship—the student learning from the master, the disciple learning from the teacher.

"Thy paths" (orchoteyka, אֶרֶחֶתְּיךָ) refers to specific trails, tracks, or roads—more particular than "ways." If ways are general principles, paths are specific applications. David seeks both comprehensive understanding of God's character

and detailed guidance for specific decisions. This double petition recognizes that knowing general truth about God must translate into specific daily choices.

Historical Context

The request for divine instruction reflects Israel's covenant relationship where God committed to guide His people. At Sinai, God gave Torah (instruction, teaching) to guide Israel's life. Deuteronomy 5:33 commands: "Ye shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you." The book of Proverbs repeatedly emphasizes seeking wisdom and understanding God's paths.

David had learned through painful experience that following his own way led to disaster. His adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah demonstrated the tragic consequences of departing from God's paths. His psalms of repentance (Psalm 51) and renewed commitment to following God reflect hard-won wisdom.

Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature commonly discussed "the way" of wisdom versus foolishness, life versus death. Proverbs contrasts the path of the righteous with the way of the wicked. Jesus later declared: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), embodying the path to God that David sought.

The emphasis on teachability—being instructed rather than self-directed—challenged ancient and modern pride. Proverbs 3:5-6 commands: "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." David models this humble posture of learning from God rather than trusting his own insight.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. Why must God's ways be revealed rather than discovered through human wisdom alone, and what does this say about the limits of natural reason in spiritual matters?
2. What is the difference between knowing God's general 'ways' and learning His specific 'paths' for your life, and why do you need both?
3. How does teachability (being instructed by God) conflict with modern emphasis on self-direction and trusting your own judgment?
4. In what areas of life are you currently trying to figure out your own way instead of asking God to show you His paths?
5. How do Scripture, wise counsel, and the Spirit's leading work together in revealing God's ways and paths to believers?

Interlinear Text

לְמַדְּנִי אֶרְחֹת יְבָדֵל תְּדַבֵּר יְהָוָה בְּדַבֵּר יְהָוָה
me thy ways O LORD Shew me thy paths teach
H1870 H3068 H3045 H734 H3925

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 86:11 (References Lord): Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name.

Psalms 27:11 (References Lord): Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.

Psalms 143:8 (Parallel theme): Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee.

Psalms 5:8 (References Lord): Lead me, O LORD, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face.

Exodus 33:13 (Parallel theme): Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people.

Psalms 119:27 (Parallel theme): Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.

Jeremiah 6:16 (References Lord): Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.

Isaiah 2:3 (References Lord): And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Proverbs 8:20 (Parallel theme): I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment:

Psalms 5:1 (References Lord): Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation.