

Tav
Psalm 119:169-176
ABC 12/30/18

In March we began our trek through the heights & valleys of Psalm 119. Today, 25 messages later, we complete our journey. As we leave this Mt Everest of the Psalms, this summit of the glory & greatness & sufficiency & supremacy of God's Word, I pray our love for the God of the Word & for the Word of God has grown. Throughout this psalm the author has again & again expressed how much he loves God's Word, how much he wants to know God's Word, how much he studies God's Word, & how he wants to live by God's Word. He prays time & again that God would help him to learn, understand, & meditate on God's Word. Do we do that? Let's read it, pray, & then see 5 ways we're to be different. **169-176** PRAY

1. Think Differently (169)

It all starts here. As a man thinks in his heart, so is he (Prov 23:7). Our thinking must change so it'll affect our whole being, heart, mind, words, & actions. Biblical transformation is by the renewing of our mind (Rom 12:2) with Scripture & the more we think biblically the more we then live differently. **169**

The constant cry of the author for help wasn't for the things we think of 1st & pray for hardest. He had the insight to know his great need was biblical insight, teaching, & understanding. This is a man who thought differently than most of us. He processed all the trials & struggles of life through a God-ward lens, a God-centered worldview, a God-oriented perspective. His great need & great request through difficult times was for more biblical discernment from God's Word to know how to apply God's Word. This understanding is not mere information, but is for transformation. Vs 27 tells us, **Make me understand... so I will meditate.** Vs 34, **Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law & keep it with all my heart.** Vs 73, **Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.** Vs 104, **From Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way.** Vs 125 he prays, **Give me understanding, that I may know Your testimonies.** Vs 130, **The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.** Vs 144, **Give me understanding that I may live.** Why does he want

understanding? So he can obey Scripture & truly live a life pleasing to God. The evidence that a person has wisdom is that they ask for God's wisdom rather than the many things less mature believers pray for. This godly man knew his great need was for his mind to be continually renewed by God's truth, which is one of the things that stands out in this psalm (he prays **teach me** 10x, **give me understanding** 5x, **that I may learn** or **observe** 4x). If this psalm has had any effect on us, let it be the effect of what our mind values above everything else, which should be to know & live the truths of the Word of God. The more we know the Bible the more we know how little we really know. The more you learn of God's Word, the more you realize how much you still have to learn. If we truly have **understanding** we'll recognize our continual need for more & more **understanding** from God's Word. The word **understanding** is often translated *discernment*. So this last section of the psalm begins with a cry for discernment. How did Solomon put it in Prov 2?

For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding... Then you will discern the fear of the LORD & discover the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge & understanding... Then you will discern righteousness & justice & equity & every good course (3-9).

The whole book of Proverbs begins this way: **The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom & instruction, To discern the sayings of understanding, to receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice, & equity (1:2).**

When God gave Solomon the choice of one wish for whatever he could have, Solomon correctly asked for wisdom & discernment as his greatest need. This biblical word for *discernment* has been defined as the learned skill of understanding & applying God's Word with the purpose of separating truth from error & right from wrong.¹ Jay Adams says one isn't...

...supposed to just pray for discernment & wait until it suddenly strikes him out of the blue. No, he is to pray for it to come from his study of God's Word. Too many want wisdom, discernment, & knowledge handed to them on a silver platter. It doesn't come that way. These things come through the disciplined, regular study & application of the Scriptures to life's circumstances. & usually, that is only "by reason of practice" in interpreting & utilizing biblical teaching.²

Heb 5:14 tells us **the mature ... because of practice have their senses trained to discern good & evil.** Are you training your senses to discern good & evil by having a steady diet of God's Word?

¹ Tim Challies, *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*, p 61

² *Counsel from Psalm 119*, p 136

What is your plan for reading God's Word in 2019? Church FB page will have some links to a variety of plans. As Christians we must think differently & we do this only as we become saturated with God's Word.

2. Speak Differently (170-72) Charles Spurgeon put it this way:

Oh, that you & I might get into the very heart of the Word of God, & get that Word into ourselves! As I have seen the silkworm eat into the leaf, & consume it, so ought we to do with the Word of the Lord—not crawl over its surface, but eat right into it till we have taken it into our inmost parts. It is idle merely to let the eye glance over the words, or to recollect the poetical expressions, or the historic facts; but it is blessed to eat into the very soul of the Bible until, at last, you come to talk in Scriptural language, & your very style is fashioned upon Scripture models, & what is better still, your spirit is flavored with the words of the Lord.

I would quote John Bunyan as an instance of what I mean. Read anything of his, & you will see that it is almost like the reading the Bible itself. He had read it till his very soul was saturated with Scripture; & though his writings are charmingly full of poetry, yet he cannot give us his Pilgrim's Progress—that sweetest of all prose poems — without continually making us feel & say, "Why, this man is a living Bible!" Prick him anywhere—his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his very soul is full of the Word of God. I commend his example to you, beloved.³

As you read writers like him, they speak differently, biblically. This man of God in Ps 119 not only thinks differently, but as a result he speaks differently to God & to others about God & His Word.

170

The petitions **give me understanding** & **deliver me** go hand-in-hand, because the poet is one who is being persecuted because of his faith & he's just as much in need of the fortifying of his faith as of deliverance from the outward restraint that is put upon him.⁴ Both vss 169 & 170 have the language of his request coming **before You**, which was language that could be used of bringing a sacrifice of worship or of coming into the very close presence of the Lord, coming before the throne of God above. Again Spurgeon says,

"Let my cry come near before thee, O Lord." He is tremblingly afraid lest he should not be heard. He is conscious that his prayer is nothing better than the "cry" of a poor child, or the groan of a wounded beast. He dreads lest it should be shut out from the ear of the Most High; but he very boldly prays that it may come before God, that it may be in his ear, under his notice, & looked upon with his acceptance. Yea, he goes further, & entreats, "Let my cry come near before thee, O Lord": he wants the Lord's attention to his prayer to be very close & considerate.

He uses a figure of speech & personifies his prayer. We may picture his prayer as Esther, venturing into the royal presence, entreating an audience, & begging to find favor in the sight of

³ "Mr. Spurgeon as a Literary Man," in *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon*, vol. 4, p 268

⁴ Keil & Delitzsch, *Commentary on the OT*, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/kad/psalms/119.htm>

the blessed & only Potentate. It is a very sweet thing to a suppliant when he knows of a surety that his prayer has obtained audience, when it has trodden the sea of glass before the throne, & has come even to the footstool of the glorious seat around which heaven & earth adore. It is to Jehovah that this prayer is expressed with trembling earnestness ... "O Lord." We crave audience of none else, for we have confidence in none beside.⁵

170

Supplication is an OT term for a prayer of grace & the words **deliver me** have been described as a rescue, like taking prey out of an animal's mouth. It's basic physical idea is drawing out or pulling out, or in some cases to take or snatch away. Thus deliver, rescue, & save. But all of this is **according to Your word or Your promises**. It's not by my will or my desires or in my way, but in Your will & way, consistent with Your promises. 171

Utter can mean bubbling up of a spring or a pouring or gushing forth. The poet wants his lips to bubble over with praise that comes from the spring of his heart, pouring forth the overflow from deep within. Like a geyser or artesian spring, he wants to gush out his praise of His always faithful God regularly for all to hear. When God teaches us something from His Word our lips should utter praise. 172

In other words, God's Word affects what comes out of our mouth. The Word-saturated person, like Bunyan, will speak differently. We all should be walking, talking, singing Bibles. Scripture should be on our lips (171) & on our tongues (172). The beautiful picture of the godly woman in Prov 31 says, **She opens her mouth in wisdom, & the teaching of kindness is on her tongue** (26). God's Word should always impact how we speak. As Eph 5 says, we should be **speaking to one another in psalms & hymns & spiritual songs, singing & making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father** (19-20). Col 3:16-17 says those same effects are natural results of the Word of Christ richly dwelling in us with all wisdom. We should speak so differently that the world will ask what makes us different, what's the reason for the hope within us? & then we must tell them!

One of the things recorded in the writings of the great spiritual awakenings & movements of God in the early colonies with people like Jonathan Edwards, was that the people spoke differently;

⁵ *The Golden Alphabet*, www.gospelweb.net/SpurgeonGoldenAlphabet/FS_GoldenAlphabet.htm

they spoke of spiritual things rather than superficial things with other Christians. Somehow we've lost that. Why don't we talk to people after the service of spiritual things from the text, instead of things of little importance? Why don't we invite someone over from church you don't know as well & as part of your time, share what God is doing in your life & what you're learning & ask how you can pray? Why not get together for coffee with someone with the sole purpose of spiritual conversations or even get a book to go through together & discuss things that challenged you in it? We must think differently, speak differently, 3rd ...

3. Live Differently 173

As dependent as he is on God's help & grace in the 1st half of the vs, there's still a choice the psalmist must make in his growth as a believer (2nd half). Salvation is all of God & His grace & nothing of human effort. As Rom 9 says, **it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs but on God who has mercy** (16). But sanctification, the process of Christian growth, requires our effort & our will & our running the race set before us, with the mercy & grace of God empowering us. God still gets all the glory & credit & is still sovereign in both, but our responsibility is equally emphasized in this vs with the words, **I have chosen**. What challenge did Joshua give the people of Israel? **Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve** (Josh 24:15). Jesus said to Martha, **Only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part** (Lk 10:42), the part of listening to the Lord & His Word. Once again we see the tension between God's sovereignty & man's will. **I have chosen** seems to minimize God's sovereignty or our dependence on Him. But Ps 119 has many statements of decisions & determination & dedication, & we need to let Scripture stand with its equal emphasis on human responsibility along with God's sovereignty. It's true Rom 3 says we don't have ability in our fallen humanity to do good, choose God, or even seek God, but as redeemed humanity we must do so by God's grace which enables us to do so. But this isn't a *let go & let God*, do nothing mindset. No, we actively get going with grit & determination & we lean in & trust God fully as we do so. Listen again to vss 30-32. **I have chosen the faithful way; I have placed Your ordinances before me. I cling to Your testimonies; O LORD, do not put me to shame! I shall run the way of Your commandments, For You will enlarge**

my heart. There's no question in the context of this psalm that the author utterly depended on God to enable his heart to do all these things. There's also no question he made deliberate efforts to choose & run & cling to the Word & place it always before himself. But he also speaks of God's **hand** which stands symbolically for a person's power or strength, like God helping the needy (Ps 80:17, 139:10) or punishing the wicked (32:4, Is 5:25). See the tension between our choosing & God's sovereignty? In Col 1:29 Paul tells us, **For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.** This process on our part is labor, *holy sweat* as the Puritans called it. It's hard work but it's not mere human work, it's God's work within us. Jay Adams writes:

Don't fail to note that obedience is a choice. Even a believer won't automatically or naturally do God's will. He must determine to do so. It is a choice in which it is necessary to move out in obedience asking God to help as you do. The vs does not recommend sitting around waiting for some sort of strength or wisdom from God before acting. Rather, it is making the right choice &, as he goes forward in obedience, asking for God's personal assistance. The strength often comes in the doing.⁶

Sitting down & hearing God's Word or reading God's Word must be accompanied by asking yourself, *How should I live as a result of what I've read?* Godly living doesn't come through osmosis. Reading the Bible without comprehension or understanding doesn't change you. Sitting through a sermon without applying it doesn't change you. Don't leave this study in Ps 119 without asking how you should live differently as a result. Read through & study this Psalm again (all the sermons & notes are on the website if you want to study further). We must all be like Ezra who **had set his heart to study the law of the Lord & to practice it** (Ezra 7:10). Think, Speak, Live, & 4th ...

4. Read Differently 174

One writer says: *Although his distress was exceedingly acute & although he had no guarantee in hand on how or when his LORD might act on his behalf, the man of God was still drawing refreshment out of the unfathomable well of the Word of God.⁷* This longing for salvation that OT saints had, to whatever degree they understood it fully or not, is fulfilled ultimately & finally in

⁶ Adams, p 138

⁷ George Zemek, *The Word of God in the Child of God*, p 380

the person & work of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. I hope that one of the ways I can help us read differently is to see how Christ-centered & Christ-focused this book is, including the OT which Jesus fulfills & which He told the disciples on the Road to Emmaus that the OT was about Him. The whole Bible is the Word of Christ, pointing forward to Christ in the Old, & looking back at His finished & sufficient work of salvation in the New.

This vs says, **Your law is my delight**. In vs 161-168 he said 3x he loved God's law & he says the same thing repeatedly in this psalm, which may sound strange to our ears. Who would ever write a love poem to a law? But that's what Ps 119 is. Leon Morris comments: *Christians today often think of the law as a burdensome restriction, but that was not the way the psalmist responded to it. To him the law was God's loving gift meant to guide his people in the right way, & the psalmist welcomed it, exulted in it, & loved it.*⁸ God's rules, commandments, & **law** are actually a gracious blessing. This word **law**, *Torah*, originally referred to the 1st 5 books written by Moses, the Pentateuch. It later took on a broader meaning for all God's teaching & instruction. When this psalm was written, it's possible the writer only had access to the books of the **law**, Genesis through Deuteronomy. But he still greatly loved & rejoiced in them. How much more should we love & rejoice in this Book now that we have its fullness & the glorious gospel & the rest of the story? & we should love all of God's Word not just our favorite parts or passages. That's one reason we're beginning to read through the Minor Prophets together. No, we aren't OT Israelites bound by Mosaic Law & its civil codes unique to the theocratic kingdom in the land. We're not under its ceremonial & sacrificial laws. Jesus fulfilled the system of sacrifice on the cross & the veil of the temple was torn in two signifying the ending of the old covenant. But Paul, who understood & preached that himself, still said he loved & delighted in God's law joyfully (Rom 7:22). & he taught God's moral standards as still having relevance today. How? In unbelievers by convicting them within by God's law written on their hearts (2:14-17), & for believers, it reveals our sin as well (Rom 7:7). Though the **law** cannot save, Rom 3:31 says, **Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary we establish the law.** Being saved by grace

⁸ *Testaments of Love*, p 49

doesn't make the Lord's commands irrelevant or optional for Christians. In Rom 6 Paul emphatically rebukes those who say we can disobey & sin because *we're under grace, not under law*. 1 Jn 5:3 says those who truly love God **keep His commandments**. He writes this in the present tense because it's to be the ongoing pattern of life. We can do this because His **commandments are not burdensome**. We can also love them because they're for our good. We can even love reading Leviticus & Deuteronomy because they reveal the character of the God we love. Some of us need to read differently by seeking to love & delight more in the parts we don't know as well as others, because all is inspired & profitable to us. **Your law is my delight**. Can you say that? Finally, we're to ...

5. Pray Differently 175

This vs recognizes our reason for living is to glorify God & enjoy Him forever. Praise involves both glorifying God & enjoying His presence & one of the ways we should pray differently is by praising God more. The author's desire for living isn't for personal comfort or to make it to retirement or to see the Sacramento Kings win a NBA title. No, he wants to live so he can praise God! Is that our desire & goal in life? We may say it is, but do we actually mean it?

The final vs of this Mt Everest of the Psalms doesn't end on a high note, but in a valley. **176**

This somewhat surprising closing vs is Ps 119's longest but the writer speaks of himself as small, vulnerable, in the valley of shadows, exposed to enemies, & feeling lost like sheep not knowing where to find rest or shelter if left to his own wanderings. After 175 vss of some of the loftiest language of a man as in love with God & His Word as seems humanly possible, he still knows he hasn't arrived. He knows he's still in complete need of the Lord. Or as Paul says, **Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on** (Phil 3:12). **Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!** (Rom 7:24-25). Thanks be to Jesus, our Good Shepherd, we can pray to Him & say, *seek me*. A mature believer will sin less than before but will be more aware of & convicted of his sin than ever before. Martin Luther wrote: *This vs is extremely emotional & full of tears, for truly we are all thus going astray, so that we must pray to be visited, sought, & carried over by the most*

godly Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is God blessed forever. Amen.⁹ Many other commentators point to these truths. Derek Kidner says,

*Love of Scripture ... need not harden into academic pride. This man would have taken his stance not with the self-congratulating Pharisee of the parable, but with the publican who stood afar off, but went home justified.*¹⁰

*The child of God may be seen exerting himself but is never observed trusting himself. Remembering that the school days of a disciple are never over in this life, the child of God is to keep on growing in the grace & knowledge of his LORD. As he indeed does mature & evidence real growth verified by measurable patterns of consistency (e.g. v. 110), at the same time, he keeps on rising to new vistas provided by the Word of God from which he gains progressively even more insight into the sufficiencies of God, & correspondingly, the insufficiencies of self.*¹¹

As Paul says, **Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall** (1 Cor 10:12).

Warren Wiersbe writes,

*During the spiritual journey recorded in this psalm, the psalmist had experienced his ups & downs, but he had always stayed himself on the Word of God, & he did this to the very end. He opened the psalm with a benediction (v. 1), but he closed it with a warning, & both are important to the balanced Christian life. God gives us promises & assurances so we will not despair, but He gives us warnings that we might not presume. He was still the servant of God & not the servant of sin, & he still remembered God's Word, so he would not stray for long. The Good Shepherd would find him & lead him back to the fold. He would anoint his wounds with healing oil & give him a long refreshing drink of water (23:5).*¹²

The poets & song-writers jump in here as well. Here's a Charles Wesley hymn you may not be familiar with.

*Weary of wandering from my God,
And now made willing to return
I hear & bow me to the rod
For thee, not without hope, I mourn:
I have an Advocate above
A Friend before the throne of love.*

*O Jesus, full of truth & grace
More full of grace than I of sin (don't you love that?)
Yet once again I seek Thy face:
Open Thine arms & take me in
And freely my backslidings heal
And love the faithless sinner still.*

*Thou know'st the way to bring me back
My fallen spirit to restore
O for Thy truth & mercy's sake,
Forgive, & bid me sin no more:*

⁹ *First Lectures on the Psalms*, Vol 2, p 534

¹⁰ Derek Kidner, *Psalm 73-150*, p 429

¹¹ Zemek, p 382

¹² *Be Exultant*, p 142

*The ruins of my soul repair
And make my heart a house of prayer.*

*The stone to flesh again convert,
The veil of sin again remove;
Sprinkle Thy blood upon my heart,
And melt it by Thy dying love;
This rebel heart by love subdue,
And make it soft, & make it new.*

*Give to mine eyes refreshing tears,
And kindle my relentings now;
Fill my whole soul with filial fears,
To Thy sweet yoke my spirit bow;
Bend by Thy grace, O bend or break,
The iron sinew in my neck!*

*Ah! give me, Lord, the tender heart
That trembles at the approach of sin;
A godly fear of sin impart,
Implant, & root it deep within,
That I may dread Thy gracious power,
And never dare to offend Thee more.¹³*

Isaac Watts has written:

*My soul hath gone too far astray, My feet too often slip;
Yet since I've not forgot thy way, Restore thy wand'ring sheep.¹⁴*

Perhaps most familiar are the words:

*Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love,
Here's my heart, O take & seal it, seal it for thy courts above.¹⁵*

Ps 119:10-11 says, **With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments. Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.** A lost sheep needs a lamp for his feet & a light to his path to find his way back. & vs 105 says that is found by God's Word. This Psalm should cause us to pray differently as wandering sheep. The more you see the perfections of Scripture, the more you should realize your imperfections. The greater the glimpse of the Holy God in His Holy Word, the more we recognize how unholy we are. When we're God-centered we're dependent on God for all things. When you don't forget God's Word, even in the darkest of valleys, & you pray, *seek me*, He will. Those who are believers are

¹³ *Weary of Wandering from My God*

¹⁴ Hymn, *Oh that the Lord Would Guide My Ways*

¹⁵ Robert Robinson, *Come Thou Found of Every Blessing*, #104 in our hymnals

still sheep who are prone to get lost. They are sheep that belong to the Good Shepherd, but that doesn't change the fact that they are sheep that can easily get away from the fold & need the rod & the staff to comfort. Ezekiel 34 says,

Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep & seek them out. As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep & will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy & gloomy day. I will bring them out from the peoples & gather them from the countries & bring them to their own land; & I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, & in all the inhabited places of the land. I will feed them in a good pasture, & their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground & feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock & I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord GOD. "I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken & strengthen the sick ..." (11-16).

The good news is that true sheep of Jesus hear His voice & won't be utterly lost but will repent & be brought back. **All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him (Is 53:6).** Peter tells us, **For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd & Guardian of your souls (1 Pt 2:25).** Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. When one out of 100 is lost He goes after that one & personally brings it back on His shoulders to the tune of great joy in heaven (Lk 15:4). It's interesting that this Psalm starts (vs 2) with the responsibility of believers seeking God & ends with the reality of God seeking believers. Again & again throughout this Psalm, the author has sought the Lord with all his heart. His final act is to throw himself on the grace & mercy of the Great Shepherd. So he ends not with his pursuit of the Lord, but with the Lord's pursuit of him. He ends on the reminder that the power & greatness of God's Word doesn't rest only in its literary brilliance. It's greatness & glory is in the fact that God comes to us & seek us in & through His Word. Jesus seeks & saves the lost & He has the power to keep them & none of His precious sheep will ever be lost. What a wonderful Savior we have! What a wonderful Shepherd He is! Is He yours? If not, pray right now & ask that God would seek You & that you would follow Him. Please, if you do this, talk to me or someone here that we might encourage you & help you on your journey.

Psalm 119, what a great teaching tribute to God & His Word. May 2019 find us loving & living it more. PRAY