

A SERVANT OF SCRIPTURE
PSALM 119:121-128

[Harry Cole](#) was a private in the British Army that was retreating to Dunkirk in 1940. He penned a letter to his mother and family during the retreat, but his regiment was overrun by the Germans and he never made it to Dunkirk and did not make it across the channel. Three days after he wrote the letter he was killed in action — and his letter was never mailed.



Cole's letter was part of a large number of pieces of mail that were abandoned and picked up by a German soldier who took them home and stored them in his attic for nearly 30 years. In 1968 those letters were sent back to England, and again they sat in storage, as many of the addressees had also died or moved. Harry Cole's letter was never delivered — until a few weeks ago when Cole's two surviving brothers were found and the letter was delivered to them. In his letter he included this line: "Don't worry if you have to wait a long while for a letter or card sometimes Mother, as we can't always write for days at a time, also there is delay in getting it away." I guess you could call 80 years a delay.

You have to read or hear that story and think about the family and all the things they wondered about their son and brother — what would he have said to them and what was he thinking those days? And how would their lives have changed if they'd heard from him?

While mail is sometimes delayed, aren't you glad that God's Word hasn't been delayed and we don't have to wonder what He is thinking and what He has said? We have the possibility of transformed lives because we have His Word in our hands. Psalm 119 is a familiar passage that affirms the effectiveness of the Word of God. Today we continue our semi-annual series on this psalm and in today's stanza, (vv. 121-128), the psalmist particularly emphasizes that we are servants to that Word (vv. 122, 124, 125). We find that —

AS GOD'S SERVANTS, WE ARE FAITHFUL TO GOD'S WORD.

In this passage, we see four ways we are faithful to God as servants of His Word. What does it mean to be a servant of God and His Word?

1. God's Servant Seeks God's **PROTECTION** in God's Word (vv. 121-122)
2. God's Servant Longs for God's **GRACE** in God's Word (vv. 123-124)
3. God's Servant Learns God's **COUNSEL** in God's Word (vv. 125-126)
4. God's Servant Loves God's **COMMANDS** in God's Word (vv. 127-128)

1. God's Servant Seeks God's PROTECTION in God's Word (vv. 121-122)

- **In this world, there will be difficulty.** That is the promise of Jesus (Jn. 16:33). And it is the testimony of Paul and Peter. And it is exemplified in the lives of Job and Daniel and the martyred disciples and all believers (and all people) who have lived since the sin of Adam in Genesis 2. *Suffering is common to mankind.* But there is also a particular kind of suffering and trouble that the believer experiences.
 - ✓ The believer has **oppressors** (v. 121). These are people who exploit others (often because of their faith in God). It often refers to financial exploitation, but can also refer to political or social oppression — someone takes advantage of his superior position and harms someone weaker and less advantaged. It is an abuse of authority by manipulating and crushing those who are defenseless.
 - ✓ The believer is oppressed by the **arrogant** (v. 122). The same word of oppression is used in 122 as in 121 (though in the verb form). These are presumptuous people who are overconfident in their position and are willing to suppress others because they believe themselves superior.
 - ✓ This psalm not only emphasizes the reality of suffering, but it frequently points to various kinds of oppression. Not only is life hard, but the people who oppose us in life makes it even harder (vv. 22-23, 51, 107, 109-110, 113, 115, 117).
 - ✓ It is the difficult people that make the difficulties of life particularly painful. Life might be easier to endure if the people themselves weren't so troublesome.
- **How does the psalmist respond to that suffering of oppression?** He had few legal options, but he could have harmed his oppressor physically, he could have verbally protested, or he could have led a political uprising — all things that might be done today as well. He doesn't do any of those things.
 - ✓ **He lives righteously** (v. 121) — ***I have done justice and righteousness.***
 - He does not say, "I have done *all* justice and deserve God's favor." He is not being self-righteous.
 - But he is saying, "I have treated people justly and lived righteously." He is not claiming perfection, but he is saying that he has lived honorably before the Lord.
 - The NT believer can live to please God (2 Cor. 5:9; Eph. 4:1; 5:10). Similarly, the OT believer could also live honorably and pleasing to God (Dt. 10:12-16; Gal. 3:24).
 - That is what this psalmist has done; he is not an arrogant oppressor but is one who is living in submission to God and His Word. He has done what the Lord asked of him, which means that this request is not inappropriate. He is walking as someone who is in the Light (1 Jn. 1:7).
 - Someone cannot live in rebellion to God and expect God to bless him (66:18). But when we are God's children and living in fellowship with Him, it's reasonable to make these requests.
 - This also suggests that when we are suffering, self-examination is a good response — "am I really living what God has called and equipped me to be and do?"

- ✓ **He trusts God for His protection** (vv. 121a, 122). He makes two requests:
 - **Do not leave me...** He doesn't want to be left behind and abandoned — left in the hands of the oppressors without God as his defender. He means that if God doesn't intervene, he is hopeless.
 - **Be surety for Your servant...** For God to be a **surety** means that God is responsible and cares for him. It is a financial term meaning “a legal guarantee.” If he is being oppressed financially, this is particularly appropriate; even if not it means that he is dependent on God to protect him.
 - As in the first verse, it is reasonable for him to make this request, because he calls himself **Your servant**. That is, he is enslaved to God and submissive to him. The request is from one who loves God, follows God, obeys God, and delights in God. He is in right relationship to God.
 - This also suggests that God has a responsibility to care for him because of the Master-Servant relationship. The psalmist has no rights, no position, no legal appeal. He needs God to act.
 - His appeal is that God would treat him **for good** — be gracious and kind to him.

- Let's draw two implications from these opening verses:
 - ✓ When you are suffering, are you most concerned to “get justice,” or are you most concerned to act justly (rightly)? Even when we are sinned against, our response should reflect our position as followers of God (1 Pt. 2:18-20; 3:16-17; 4:13-16).
 - ✓ When you are suffering, are you willing to wait for God to defend and protect you? Do we trust God to protect us — even to protect us by allowing us to be killed and taking us home? Can I ask for grace and be content that whatever He gives me is the grace that I need (even if it's not what I want)? Remember that we do not need to survive physically, but we do need to trust God.
 - ✓ Have you noticed the emphasis on grace in these verses? He has a life founded on grace (he is God's servant by grace); he is living by grace (doing righteous deeds) and dependent on grace (he is asking for God's help). Everything we are and have is by God's grace. When we are God's people we can live contentedly, even when oppressed, that how God provides for us is best.

2. God's Servant Longs for God's **GRACE** in God's Word (vv. 123-124)

- Because the psalmist was oppressed he went to God for help and then waited. And the Lord evidently did not respond immediately since he says, **My eyes fail...** He is looking for God to provide and for that provision to give him hope. And he waits and waits. He is looking for that provision, and all he receives (evidently) is continued oppression. God has delayed, so the psalmist wants to give up — he is in despair.
- **He has two longings:**
 - ✓ He is waiting for **Your salvation** — the OT often uses “salvation” to refer to physical provision, and that's probably what is in mind here; if he is saved from his physical oppressors, God will do it.

- ✓ He is also waiting **for Your righteous Word** — He wants the Word — specifically, it's righteousness. He wants — he *longs for* — the right and true declarations of God. He wants God's faithfulness.
- ✓ Both these phrases mean that the psalmist is turning to God for help. He looks to God because "Amidst all sorts of dark circumstances a flame of real confidence in God's word burned within him." [Zemek] He longs for and waits for God because He believes God is both able and good.
- ✓ Notice that while his eyes are straining to look for God's help, he does not stop looking. He continues to look and trust. He is getting weary and worn down, but he does not stop.
- ✓ When we are in hardship what are our longings? Do we want God (and His salvation)? Do we want His Word to speak into our problems (and dissect our hearts)? Or do we want problems to go away?
- When he is tempted to despair **he makes two requests:**
 - ✓ **Deal with Your servant according to Your lovingkindness.** He is appealing and asking for God's grace and God's mercy. This is God's loyalty to His people. It's His love exhibited in kindness.
 - He is appealing as **Your servant**. The word is used equally of "servant" and "slave." Either way, he has placed himself in submission to God, acknowledging God's superiority. It also means that he is dependent on God and incapable of caring for himself.
 - Because he is a servant he cannot make a demand and can only make an appeal and request. This is no demand, but a humble, contented request — "God, please help me."
 - The psalmist is not appealing to merit, because as a sinner he has no merit. This is the only appeal he (or we) can make. Listen to what Stephen Yuille says about this:

"It is a confession of our utter sinfulness and weakness. Often, we try to hide what we are in a veneer of respectability. But there are moments when what is hidden comes into view—fits of rage, lust, and envy. These moments show us who we really are. Our efforts to compensate with our works, traditions, regulations, and religion simply feed the root of our sin—self-centeredness. We are left with only one plea: Deal with Your servant according to Your mercy....God hasn't promised temporal deliverance from every trial we encounter. He hasn't promised us that we will live above the turmoil of this fallen world. He has promised to guard us from ultimate evil—the loss of Him. And He has promised to sustain us through seasons of lament by reviving our sense of His distinguishing love as revealed in His word." [Yuille, 143.]

- ✓ **Teach me Your statutes.** Because he has submitted himself to God, he also asks to be taught by God. Specifically, he wants to know God's statutes — the binding requirements of Scripture, the duties that God has engraved in stone (literally) for His followers to obey. This is a tacit affirmation that God's commands are a means of grace — when we know and obey God's commands, we will experience grace and provision from God.
- ✓ "God rarely works apart from His Word. We see in this verse how the psalmist recognizes the central place that the Scriptures play in communicating grace." [Adams, 104.]

- Waiting for God and seeking the grace God provides is not optional for the believer.
 - ✓ *Waiting is not optional because it is not vain to wait.* There is always fulfillment in God and His promises. He is faithful and will always give the best for His people (**1 Thess. 5:23-24**).
 - ✓ *Waiting is not optional because our time is not God's time.* "God's help comes only according to His timetable. He does not always intervene when we ask. He has His purpose in delaying. The story of Jesus delaying His response to the word that came from Mary and Martha about Lazarus dying is an example." [Adams, *Counsel from Psalm 119*, 103.]
 - ✓ Charles Bridges rightly said, "Though he delays his promise, and holds us as it were in suspense; yet he would have us know, that he has not forgotten *the word of his righteousness*....Whether the Lord deliver us or not, prayer and waiting will not be lost. It is a blessed posture for him to find us in, such as will not fail to ensure his acceptance, even though our request should be denied."
 - ✓ Do you long for God, wait for God, and trust that His grace will come at the right time?
 - ✓ I listened to a Western recently and someone was in trouble and you could see it coming; sure enough, someone came over the ridge at just the right time to save the good guys. I rolled my eyes — it's "too good to be true..." But friends, whatever grace we need, God will give at the right time. It may not be the answer we want or anticipate, but it will be God's answer, and it will be gracious.

3. God's Servant Learns God's COUNSEL in God's Word (vv. 125-126)

- For the third time the psalmist affirms that he is God's **servant**, enslaved to God (v. 125). Previously the implications were that he was dependent on God's grace for provision. Here he says he is dependent on God to teach him.
 - ✓ He needs to be taught because he doesn't have **understanding**. The word refers to discernment — an ability to distinguish between differing things. The request is repeated (vv. 34, 73, 130, 133, 169).
 - ✓ He wants this understanding so that he might **know Your testimonies**. He is not asking for discernment in general, but the understanding that comes from and through knowing the truths that are a witness ("testimony") of God — they are the dependable truths of God.
 - ✓ He is not picking and choosing what he wants from God's Word. He is willing to submit to and obey all of it. He is committed to all of it.
 - ✓ When the psalmist says he lacks understanding and needs truth, it is a way to say that life is overwhelming to him (especially in his suffering and oppression). He needs counsel, instruction, correction, encouragement, and admonishment.
 - ✓ Whatever our need is, God's Word is effective to deal with it (**Psalm 19:7-11**).

✓ So one writer says —

If we are struggling with discouragement arising from affliction, it will strengthen us. If we are struggling with destructive patterns in our thinking and living, it will cause us to forsake our sin. If we are struggling with pride, envy, or bitterness, it will cultivate poverty of spirit within us. If we are struggling to forgive those who've hurt us, it will cause us to weep on their behalf...

If we are struggling with the call to deny self, it will make us willing to live for Him. If we are struggling with addiction, it will captivate our heart and satisfy our deepest longing. If we are struggling to resist the world's allurements, it will turn our heart away from the world's unholy trinity of pleasure, profit, and power. If we are struggling with laziness and carelessness, it will awaken us from our slumber. If we are struggling to come to grips with numerous uncertainties, it will calm our greatest fears. [Yuille, 144.]

- The psalmist then points to one particular way that he has gained understanding — he knows when ***the Lord should act*** — the word “act” is actually “intervene.” There is an appropriate time for God to step in.
 - ✓ The reason that God should act now is that ***they have broken Your Law*** (v. 126b). He may lack understanding, but he has enough to know when some sin against God and he knows enough to know what God should (and will) do about it.
 - In breaking the Law, they render it “useless.” They invalidate it. They scoff at it and reject it.
 - Specifically, they are rejecting the ***Law*** — the Torah, the Mosaic commandments. They are lawbreakers and lawless (1 Jn. 3:4, 8; **Mt. 7:23; 23:28**) and they deserve judgment.
 - ✓ He knows the serious nature of sin and violating God's Law.
- While he is trusting God to act against lawlessness (and essentially asking for God to act), this also reminds us of four realities:
 - ✓ ***We must learn and accept the counsel of God's Word.*** Scripture is opposed to the world system and the world values. We need to let it shape and guide us, regardless of where that leads us and how differently we may then appear to be to the world. We need mind renewal (**2 Cor. 10:4-5**).
 - ✓ ***We have a responsibility to warn unbelievers of the dangers of rejecting God and living lawlessly.*** I'm not talking about standing on a street corner in political debate but about conversations when people mock God and say things like, “Are you worried about my salvation — I'm ok with God...” We need to tell them, “But God is not ok with you and you *must* be worried enough to repent...”
 - ✓ ***We can pray for God's righteous judgment against sin.*** It sounds harsh, but when we pray for His judgment, we are also saying we want Him to be honored. We want the insults against His Word and His name to be righteously judged and for Him to be exalted (e.g., **Ps. 79:6-7, 11-12**).
 - ✓ ***We also must rest in contentment that one day God will act.*** There is so much unrighteousness evident now, and God will act against it one day. And He and His righteousness will prevail (**1 Th. 4:18; 5:11**).

4. God's Servant Loves God's COMMANDS in God's Word (vv. 127-128)

- *To love God's commandments is to love them above anything else (127).*

- ✓ In v. 127, the psalmist affirms his love for God's Word, as he does frequently in this psalm (cf. vv. 47, 48, 97, 113, 119, 140, 159, 163, 165, 167). He not only is *submissive* to the Word, but he *loves* it.
- ✓ Here he affirms that he loves ***Your commandments*** — the authority of God's command — he loves that God directs and orders him (isn't that contrary to the world!).
- ✓ How much does he love it? (Remember that game with your children/grandchildren)? He loves it ***above gold, yes, above fine gold***. He loves it more than gold — even the purest gold. He loves how God orders him to live, because he knows that will give him eternal wealth that is greater than gold.
- ✓ In **v. 11**, he similarly says that the Word of God is a "treasure" to him. The commands are not wearying, they are liberating. There is refreshment, hope, and freedom in God's Word (**Rom. 6:22**).
- ✓ Do we love God's Word in this way? As God examines our hearts, can we say, knowing that He knows all things about us, that we love His Word and love Him to command us — *above all else*?

- *To love God's commandments is to hate every sin (128).*

- ✓ Because the psalmist longs for God's commands more than the greatest earthly possession, he then (***therefore***) values (***esteems***) what God says about ***everything***.
- ✓ When he says he "esteems" what God says, he means that he is setting himself straight by that Word.
- ✓ He is willing to let God shape the way he thinks about everything in the world. Will the singers of this song and will we allow God to transform what we think about the world? Or will the world shape the way we think about God's Word? That's the primary decision about Scripture.
- ✓ While he says that he aligns himself to God's ***precepts*** in everything, he applies it more narrowly — ***I hate every false way***. Because he loves God's Word, he hates the licentious ways of the world.
 - He hates (and that word means exactly that — hatred) anything that is ***false***. He hates anything that is in conflict with the revealed truth of God. He hates anything that is not right.
 - He finds no delight in anything that is unrighteous — he hates ***every*** false way. He does not allow himself to find any delight in any sin. He will not be entertained by evil.
 - There is no room for tolerance of any ungodly desires or activities in the believer's life. He is called to hate all evil and love all things that are righteous and good. He will never be changed as long as he is tolerant of evil in any form.
 - This is not to say that he won't struggle with some temptations; to be alive is to live with temptation. But it is to say that there is no embracing and adhering and delight in evil.
 - "Till a man hates [sin], the soul is not thoroughly resolved against it, as a man is never thoroughly gained to God till he loves holiness for holiness' sake." [Thomas Manton]
- ✓ A servant of God is one who hates the things opposed to God; his submission leads him to love God and His commands, and hate everything that is in opposition to God.

CONCLUSION: I found Stephen Yuille's chapter on this passage helpful. He applies this passage this way:

Why doesn't God just make [our problems] go away? [We believe] that everything would be better if... circumstances were different....Here is a fascinating and very revealing exercise. Complete the following statements: "Life will be better when..." "Life will be easier when..." "I'll be happy when..." If we complete these sentences with anything but God, we'll never know blessedness. Why? Apart from God, the "when" is always changing. As soon as we reach one thing, we begin to obsess over the next. There is only one person who will make us happy, whatever our circumstances: "You are my Lord, my goodness is nothing apart from You" (Ps. 16:2). God is our Lord....we are God's servants... [*The Path of Life*, 141-2.]

In God's grace, He has made us His servants. In God's grace He has revealed Himself in His Word. Are we faithful to that Word and to that calling? In the remaining months of this year, can we renew our commitment to faithfulness to Him and His Word? It's not *a book*. It's the only Book. Let us work to be increasingly faithful and loyal as His servants to that book.

BENEDICTION: Ps. 19:13-14