

**THE BIBLE AND PRAYER**  
**PSALM 119:169-176**

At the beginning and middle of every new year, we spend one Sunday being reminded of the importance of the Word of God in our lives from Psalm 119. This morning, we come to the last stanza in this great text. We will find in this passage many of the same themes we have seen elsewhere in the psalm:

- ✓ Praying for understanding (v. 169; cf. vv. 27, 34, 73, 125, 144)
- ✓ Living “according to Your word” (v. 170; cf. vv. 41, 58, 76, 116)
- ✓ The need for divine teaching (v. 171; cf. vv. 7, 12, 26, 64, 66, 68, 71, 73, 99, 108, 124, 135)
- ✓ God’s and His Word’s righteousness (v. 172; cf. vv. 75, 138, 144)
- ✓ The psalmist’s need for “help” (vv. 173, 175; cf. v. 86)
- ✓ The psalmist’s need “for Your salvation” (v. 174; cf. vv. 123, 166)
- ✓ “Your law is my delight” (v. 174; cf. vv. 77, 92; cp. vv. 24, 143)
- ✓ The desire to “live” (v. 175; cf. vv. 17, 25, 37, 40, 50, 77, 88, 93, 107, 116, 144, 149, 154, 156, 159)
- ✓ I am “Your servant” (v. 176; cf. vv. 16, 17, 23, 65, 84, 122, 124, 125).
- ✓ “I do not forget Your” Word (v. 176; cf. vv. 61, 83, 109, 141, 153). [Barrick, 33-4.]

But there is also something of a new emphasis as well — the uniting of the themes of Bible and prayer. While the psalmist petitions and prays in other stanzas, this may be the most prayer-centric stanza in the psalm. As the psalmist reads, he is encouraged to pray, and as he prays, he remembers the importance of the Word of God. And that is a reminder to us of the importance of both these components to our spiritual lives — we need both Word and prayer. Someone has asked “which is more important in the spiritual life, the Bible or prayer?” And a wise man answered: “Which wing of an airplane is most important, port or starboard? You need both for the plane to fly — and so you need both Bible and prayer to progress spiritually.” And that is the message of this stanza; in this last stanza (vv. 169-176) we are told:

*LET THE WORD INFORM YOUR PRAYERS.*

*LET YOUR PRAYERS LEAD YOU TO THE WORD.*

Like many of the stanzas in this psalm, there is an awareness that the psalmist is writing in the context of suffering and hardship. When you are suffering (from your sin, the sins of others, or the fallenness of the world), then read and pray. When suffering, imitate the **four prayers** of the psalmist:

1. “Lord, **HEAR** My Prayer” (vv. 169-170)
2. “Lord, I Give You My **PRAISE**” (vv. 171-172)
3. “Lord, Be **NEAR** Me” (vv. 173-175)
4. “Lord, **FORGIVE** My Sin” (v. 176)

LET THE WORD INFORM YOUR PRAYERS.

LET YOUR PRAYERS LEAD YOU TO THE WORD.

## 1. "Lord, HEAR My Prayer" (vv. 169-170)

- The psalmist begins the final stanza with a prayer and request — ***Let my cry come before You***
  - ✓ The word "cry" often is a cry of jubilation and rejoicing (what I did when the Rangers won WS)
  - ✓ But less frequently it is also a cry of lament, which is what it appears to be here:
    - He needs understanding (169b)
    - He makes supplication for deliverance (170)
    - He seeks the helping hand of the Lord (173)
    - He longs for God's salvation (174)
    - And his trouble may be related to his sin — he has gone astray from the Lord (176).
  - ✓ The request he makes in v. 170a is the same as v. 169 — ***let my supplication come before You***.
  - ✓ Whatever has happened, the psalmist is suffering (which is a repeated theme in the psalm (cf. vv. 153, 156-157, 161...))
  - ✓ And in his suffering, this request is one that asks, "will You hear me?...will You answer me?" And "will you notice me?" He wants assurance that God is a prayer hearing God and we do too (and He is, **Prov. 15:29**). He is appealing to God for His grace (we are ever-dependent on grace).
  - ✓ The psalmist and we cannot compel God to act for us; He is not obligated to us. But He is inclined to love and care and give and sustain us. He loves to be gracious to His people (e.g., **103:8-14**; **116:5-8**).
- Notice the content of his prayers (he asks for three things):
  1. Do you notice the little prepositional phrases come ***before You***? He is asking not only for God's action for him, but **he is asking for God's fellowship** with him (echoing **v. 168b** — "You see all things and are in the presence of all things; and I want my prayers and me to be in Your presence").
    - When we pray and ask God for help do we want the help or do we want Him? He is not our geni.
    - There is nothing wrong for asking for help; but since we are created to have fellowship with Him and He saved us so that we could be with Him and Him with us, do we want Him?
    - Our prayers should not only include requests for help, but requests for Him — "will I know You and Your fellowship more fully because of this circumstance and need?"
  2. **He also asks for understanding** — ***give me understanding*** (**v. 169b**). This is a request for discernment to comprehend his problem and what he should do and learn.
    - His request is simply, "What should I do?" Because he doesn't (and we don't) know.
    - He also asks that the understanding he receives would conform to ***Your word***.
    - There are many sources of pseudo-wisdom, but only one source of wisdom. Only the word of God will make sense of our suffering and difficulties — it will keep us from sin (**101**), it will revive us (**107**), it will give us delight (**92**), and it will teach and transform us (**71**) — and in our trials.

3. He asks for **deliverance** (v. 170b).

- The word for deliverance typically refers to an extraction from a precarious and weighty problem. He is unable to remedy his own situation, so he turns to the Lord for help.
  - Not only does the psalmist ask for wisdom and discernment, but he also asks for provision. It's ok to ask the Father for healing (Mt. 8:7; 9:26-27; Dt. 32:39) and for food and shelter (Mt. 6:11).
  - And as in v. 170, his request is that the deliverance is **according to Your word** — that is, according to the promises in God's Word that He will care for His people. We are dependent on Him, and He delights to provide for and care for us (which we have already seen).
  - The psalmist could go to many different places for help (as can we). He goes to the Lord.
  - Think about Mary and Martha — their beloved brother is sick; they don't call for doctors, but go to the Creator and simply declared their problem (Jn. 11:3) without even a full request. And the One who loved the three siblings did what was best for them (Jn. 11:5, 23ff).
  - Whatever your problem is (and I know you have one or more), ask Him (Js. 4:2-3). He will help.
- Notice one more thing about this request — he asks the **LORD** (YHWH).
    - ✓ That is the covenant name of God. It's the God who has aligned His people Israel to Him. And He is faithful to Himself and He will keep His promises.
    - ✓ The only other time the psalmist addresses God by name in this stanza, he uses the same name (174).
    - ✓ The names suggest the psalmist's dependence on God. And all the other pronouns the psalmist uses for God affirm the same truth — God has promised; He is trustworthy; we have access to Him for help. Go to Him.

2. "Lord, I Give You My **PRAISE**" (vv. 171-172)

- When we are suffering, it is tempting to forget to praise and thank God. And worse, it's tempting to complain against God and even become angry against God.
- The psalmist reminds us of the goodness of praise; we don't know his problem, but we know his praise.
- **Let my lips utter praise** (171) and **let my tongue sing of your word** (172).
  - ✓ He doesn't just want to praise the Lord; he wants to "pour out praise;" he wants to "gush with delight."
  - ✓ And he wants his **tongue [to] sing of Your word**. In v. 171, he praises the Lord directly; in v. 172 he praises God's goodness as it is revealed in His Word. He wants to magnify the Word of God.
  - ✓ Verse 172 is also a reminder of the wisdom of using song to direct our hearts to worship. It's hard to complain against God when we have a song of praise on our lips (v. 54; Prov. 29:6).
- Why does the psalmist want to praise God?
  - ✓ He praises because (**for**) God **teaches me Your statutes**. In the word of God, the psalmist finds the binding commands of God and he learns the goodness of obeying God (including praising Him).

- ✓ It has been said of this verse that God “personally and regularly tutor[s] him in life’s ultimate survival Manual.” He praises God because God has revealed His truth and the psalmist has found direction and wisdom *in his difficulties*.
- ✓ **ASIDE:** God doesn’t teach through a spiritual zap where knowledge is mystically infused. God teaches as we read, pray, study, and meditate (vv. 15, 27, 48, 78, 148; Ps. 1:2). When you contemplate the Word of God, that Word will transform the way you live (and it is adequate for every burden and difficulty, which is why it is helpful that the psalmist didn’t identify the exact nature of his problem — so we can say “the Bible was enough for him; it will be enough for me”).
- ✓ He also praises God because He has been taught by the Word and ***all Your commandments are righteous*** (v. 172). The Bible’s commands are right in what they command and they are authoritative to make the command.
- ✓ This is another way of saying that you will never be led astray by God’s direction.
- ✓ People will frequently lead you astray with their suggestions, commands, and directions:
  - You will be given poor directions to a home.
  - You will be given no directions for the behavior of your children (“I don’t know...”).
  - You will be given uninformed and unwise counsel for your decisions.
  - You will be misled to make a foolish decision because of a friend’s agenda.
- ✓ The word of God will never give you a command that will lead you away from God and truth. Some of the commands of God are hard (because they go against the flesh), but they are never wrong.
- ✓ And that’s why the psalmist praises — “You’ve taught me and directed me and I was always led in right ways by You and Your Word.”
- ✓ Following the pattern of these verses:
  - Do you sing the Word of God? (Do you have a playlist that helps you praise?)
  - Do you regularly give focuses attention to praise and gratitude in prayer (keeping a list)?

### 3. “Lord, Be **NEAR** Me” (vv. 173-175)

- In the first four verses of this stanza, the psalmist is looking upward to his relationship with the Lord. In the final four verses he looks outward to his circumstances and his need for help.
- ✓ In v. 173 he appeals to the power of God to assist him — ***let Your hand be ready to help me***.
  - God’s ***hand*** is a reference to His power and strength. God’s hand helps the needy (139:10).
  - This is another reminder of the psalmist’s inadequacy and his dependence on God (cf. 86, 147).
  - The reason he asks for help is ***for*** (because) ***I have chosen Your precepts***. He means...
    - ... He has been faithful to the Lord; he is not requesting illegitimately (Ps. 66:18).
    - ... He is committed to follow God and His commands and wants God’s help to do so.
    - ... The psalmist is indicating that he has considered other options (***chosen***) and seen the folly of all other choices and has purposefully chosen to follow God’s commands.

... That statement is a reminder to us that every day there are choices before us and they are all choices about the road that we will follow — the road of obedience to God or the road to self-exaltation; only the Word of God will lead you in the right direction.

- If you are not a follower of God, there are only two roads in life — and only the road of trusting Christ and living for Christ will lead to joy (both now and later). Cf. **Jn. 14:6**.
- If you are a follower of Christ, you may have forgotten the priority of following and obeying Him. Jesus is the right road (Jn. 14:6). ESPN, Fox News, sexual indulgence, alcohol, consumeristic consumption won't satisfy. But He always will.
- If you are not following Him — because of rebellion, apathy, or laziness — it's time to choose Him today (like the psalmist).

✓ In **v. 174** he affirms his desire for salvation — ***I long for Your salvation***.

- Like George Bailey in "It's a Wonderful Life," the psalmist wants to live. That's what **salvation** refers to — "being saved to live."
- The question is whether he means temporal salvation (from his problem) or eternal salvation (from God's wrath). It is used both ways in the OT (and Psalms). Because of the emphasis on forgiveness in v. 176, it seems that he is probably thinking eternally.
- He wants eternal salvation because that salvation gets him to God (which is what he wanted in vv. 168-170).
- And he wants eternal salvation because ***Your law is my delight***. He is "giddy" over God's law.  
... The law provided direction for how to live, but it also demanded something (perfection) that was unattainable for salvation (Mt. 5:48). So how could the law be a delight?  
... It was a delight to the psalmist because it told him how to obey God (Js. 1:25). And his joy came from obeying what God said to do (not from the world's false entertainments).  
... And it was a delight to him because it led him to trust God for salvation (Ps. 32:1-2; **106:31**).

✓ In **v. 175** he asks for strength and wisdom — ***let my soul live*** (be revived)...***let ordinances help me***.

- His request is probably not "I want to live physically," but "renew and revive me spiritually — give me spiritual strength to endure my trials."
- So he asks for God's **ordinances [to] help me**. He wants the wise judgments that are revealed in God's word to direct how he lives in this world. He wants life — and wants transformed life.
- This is probably a request for physical life because he wants more opportunity to praise the Lord — and he is (as we are) well aware that "the dead do not praise the Lord" (115:17).

• In these three verses the psalmist is appealing for the closeness of God —

- ✓ He wants God's hand to come close and help (173)
- ✓ He wants the eternal salvation of God to enjoy His fellowship eternally (174)
- ✓ He wants physical life now so he can praise and delight in God (175)
- ✓ He is aware of the theological truth that the nearness and refuge of God is our good (**73:28**).

#### 4. "Lord, FORGIVE My Sin" (v. 176)

- This verse seems antithetical to the rest of the psalm and even antithetical to what he has already said.
  - ✓ Here he says *I have gone astray*...the words anticipate what Isaiah will write (53:6). He has wandered away spiritually — he has gone in the wrong direction.
  - ✓ Yet in vv. 10, 110 he says that he has *not* gone astray. In fact, in the next line he also says, *I do not forget Your commandments*, suggesting he is obedient to God. So what does he mean?
  - ✓ He means that while he is striving for God and pursuing righteousness, he has not fully attained. In NT terms, we say, "he is still struggling with the flesh and is not yet fully redeemed" (Gal. 5:16-17).
  - ✓ We say similar things: "You are a good man..." But we know you are not *completely* good.
  - ✓ The psalmist is obeying and growing in sanctification, but he does not trust himself; he knows he needs a redeemer.
- So he appeals to the only one who can help him — YHWH — *seek Your servant*.
  - ✓ The psalmist has wandered astray and gotten lost and he needs God to look for him, find him, and bring him back home. It has the imagery of Lk. 15:1ff. Cf. also Ps. 23; Jer. 50:6; Ezk. 34:16.
  - ✓ The psalmist's only hope for his daily struggles is God. And what he needs from God is God's reconciling forgiveness and fellowship whenever he sins. He will sin; and God will seek him and forgive him (1 Jn. 1:9). He is faithful to forgive and restore His sheep and children. If you are a believer, no sin is ever final or fatal; Christ on the cross was the final word for your sin.
  - ✓ And this God of grace is accessed through the Word and prayer. It really is that simple.

**CONCLUSION:** Psalm 119 has covered a broad number of topics. But from beginning to end, it is about the power and sufficiency of the Word of God.

In this world, we will have trouble. Sometimes the trouble comes from the world and our circumstances. Sometimes it comes from our own hearts and our own inclination to sin. Either way, we have what we need in the Word of God; and we have access to what we need in prayer.

In 2024, let the Word of God lead you to pray; let your prayer be founded on your trust in the Word of God.

Pray —

- *Pray for the Lord to hear*
- *Praise the Lord (for His nature)*
- *Ask for his nearness and provision (for His refuge)*
- *As for forgiveness and spiritual faithfulness*

**BENEDICTION:** Psalm 19:1-2