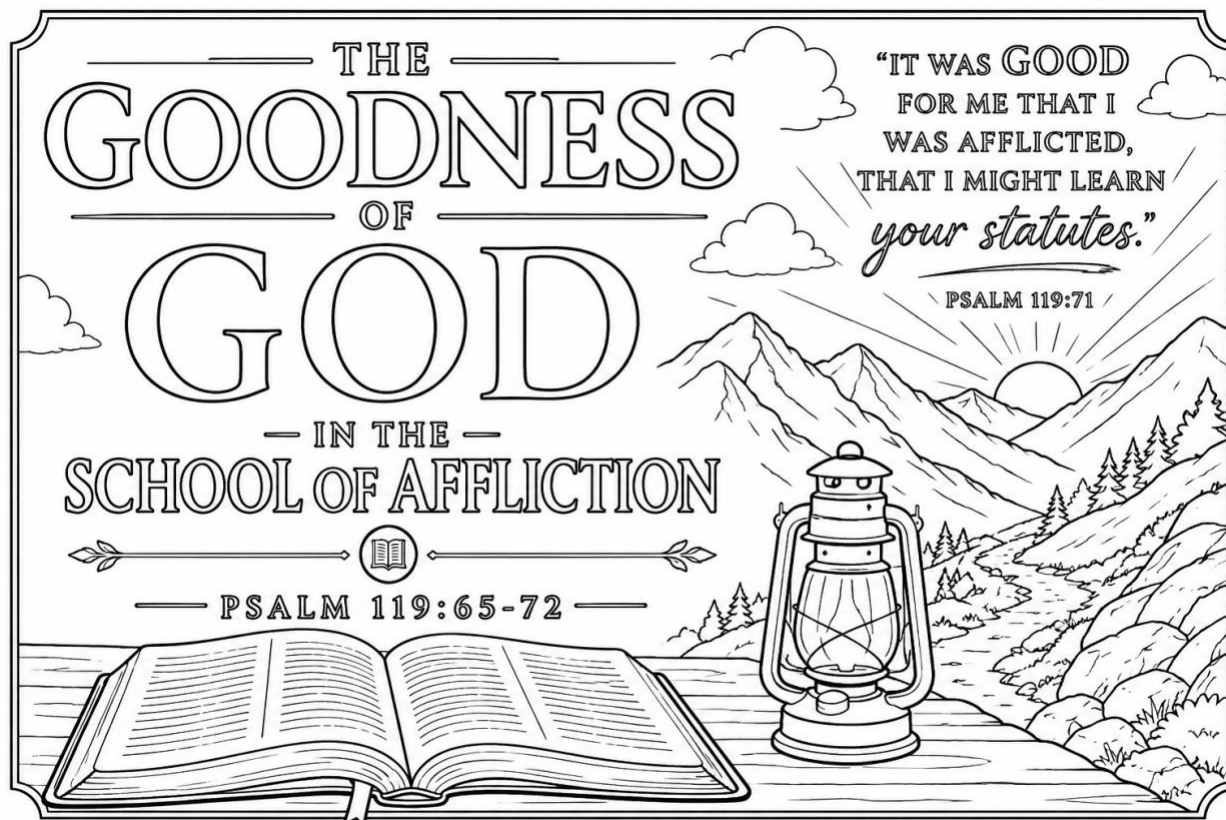




The Goodness of God in the School of Affliction
Psalm 119:65-72

Introduction: One of the things I’ve come to appreciate as we’ve journeyed through Psalm 119 is that each stanza has definite and positive movement. The psalmist isn’t simply giving us eight disconnected observations about God’s Word. He’s taking us on a spiritual pilgrimage. He begins in one place, and, by the end of the stanza, he has arrived somewhere else. Teth is a wonderful example of this.

At first glance, we assume this particular stanza is about affliction. After all, affliction appears twice (vs 67, 71), along with slander, opposition, and wandering. But as I have lived with this text throughout the week, I’ve become convinced that affliction is not the destination. It is the road.

**The destination is discovering the goodness of God so deeply
that His Word becomes our greatest treasure, even in affliction.**

Notice how the stanza begins: - *“You have dealt well with your servant...”*

And how it ends: *“...the law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.”*

That's the point. That's the reason for the journey. That's what affliction, suffering, sorrow and heartache is supposed to accomplish in our lives. Notice how the psalmist

- Begins by confessing God's goodness.
- Walks through affliction and
- Arrives at delighting in God's Word.

It starts like this - "*You have dealt **well** with your servant...*" (65)

And then...

- "*Teach me **good** judgment...*" (66)
- "*You are **good** and do **good**...*" (68)
- "*It is **good** for me that I was afflicted...*" (71)

God's goodness is the dominant theme. But that immediately raises one of life's greatest questions. How can a good God use painful things for good?

- Most people assume those two ideas – God's goodness and affliction - contradict one another.
- But the psalmist says they belong together.
- In fact, some of God's greatest acts of kindness come wrapped in painful providences.
- That doesn't mean affliction is pleasant.
- It also doesn't mean suffering isn't real.
- It means that God's goodness is greater than our pain.
- And, when we finally understand that, we begin viewing life differently.

IMP: Instead of asking, "*Why is this happening to me?*"
We begin by asking, "*What is my good God teaching me?*"

That is the journey of this stanza.

The Big Idea: Because God is always good, He graciously uses even affliction to deepen our obedience and teach us that He is our greatest treasure.

First: God's Goodness Is the Foundation of the Believer's Life (vv. 65-66) - "*You have dealt well with your servant, O LORD, according to your word.*"

The remarkable thing about this stanza is not what the psalmist says about affliction. It's where he begins. He begins with a deep and well-grounded theology.

- Before he tells us what happened to him...
- Before he mentions wandering...
- Before he mentions affliction...

- Before he speaks of slander...

He tells us what he knows about God.

That is enormously important because we naturally do exactly the opposite.

- We begin with experience.
- Something difficult happens.
- A diagnosis.
- A broken relationship.
- The loss of employment.
- A wayward child.
- A financial reversal.
- An unexpected death.

And immediately we begin interpreting God through those circumstances.

The psalmist reverses that order. He interprets his circumstances through the character of God.

There is a profound difference between those two approaches.

One asks,

- *“My circumstances are bad. Does that mean God isn’t good?”*

The other begins,

- *“God is good. So, I know there must be a good purpose in these circumstances even if I cannot yet see it.”*
- One starts with circumstances
- The other starts with theology.
- One starts with us.
- The other starts with God.
- The psalmist chooses theology.
- The psalmist chooses God.
- That is where every believer must begin.

a) He acknowledges God’s covenant faithfulness - *“You have dealt well with your servant...” (65).*

That little phrase is full of covenant language. The psalmist isn’t speaking as a stranger. Nor as a casual observer. He is God’s servant. Throughout Scripture, the servant of the Lord belongs to God.

- He lives under God's care.
- He depends upon God's provision.
- He trusts God's leadership.

Those words reminds us that the relationship itself governs everything that follows.

- God has not acted toward an enemy.
- He has acted toward His servant.

Notice also, “...*according to your word.*” (65).

That phrase appears repeatedly throughout Psalm 119. The psalmist knows God's dealings are never random, never impulsive, never arbitrary. God is always the same. And everything God does is consistent with His revealed character and covenant promises. God has never once acted contrary to His Word.

Numbers 23:19 - “God is not man, that he should lie...”

Titus 1:2 - “...God, who never lies...”

James 1:17 - “...with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

This means that God's providence can never contradict God's promises even though it sometimes appears to do so.

- Did Joseph wonder?
- What about Job?
- David in those dark caves?
- Jeremiah, when repeatedly imprisoned?
- Habakkuk definitely struggled.

They each epitomized the saying, “*If this is how you treat your friends, no wonder you have so few.*”

But eventually every one of them discovered the same thing: **God is always good.**

APP: One of the greatest comforts in suffering is remembering that God's providence never operates independently of God's promises.

- His hand is always governed by His heart.
- His providence always reflects His character.

So, he acknowledges God's covenant faithfulness and then

b) He recognizes that his faith must continue to grow.

Verse 66 surprises us. *“Teach me good judgment and knowledge...”*

Wait. The psalmist has just confessed that God has dealt well with him.

Wouldn't we expect him to say, *“Thank You.”* Instead he prays, *“Teach me.”*

Notice what he asks for. Not merely knowledge. But **good judgment** and knowledge.

- Knowledge is information.
- Good judgment is wisdom.

Discernment is the ability to see life from God's perspective. This is what the psalmist wants.

- Many people possess biblical information.
- Far fewer possess biblical discernment.

The Pharisees knew enormous amounts of Scripture. Yet they crucified Jesus to whom Scripture pointed.

Knowledge alone is insufficient. The psalmist wants wisdom. He wants the ability to interpret life God's way.

James tells us, *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God...” (James 1:5)* This stanza is God's answer.

That is exactly what the psalmist is doing. He knows that every experience in life, including suffering, requires spiritual discernment.

APP: * Most of us pray, *“Lord, change my circumstances.”*
 * The psalmist prays, *“Lord, change my understanding.”*

How can he pray like this?

c) He grounds his prayer in faith - *“...for I believe your commandments.” (66).*

That statement is easy to overlook. Don't. It is one of the most important lines in the stanza.

Notice the order.

- He doesn't say, *“Teach me so that I will believe.”*
- He says, *“I believe, so teach me.”*

Faith precedes understanding.

- Augustine famously prayed, *“I believe in order that I may understand.”*
- Anselm later described theology as “faith seeking understanding.”

That is exactly what the psalmist is doing.

He already trusts God's Word. Now he asks God to deepen his ability to live it wisely. Christian growth always works that way.

- Faith is not the reward of understanding.
- Understanding is one of the rewards of faith.

Isaiah 55:8-9 reminds us, "*My thoughts are not your thoughts...*"

There are many things we will not understand immediately. Some we may not understand until Heaven. But we can still trust God. Why? How? Because we know the character of the One who speaks.

ILL: A child driving with a parent trusts the parent without knowing the way or the destination.

Every believer eventually faces circumstances that challenge his understanding of God. The only safe place to begin is where the psalmist begins.

- Not with our feelings.
Not with our pain.
- Not with our questions.

But with God's revealed character.

- Our circumstances change.
- God does not.

That becomes the foundation for everything else the psalmist is about to say.

Transition: Now comes the question every believer eventually asks. *"If God has dealt well with His servant... If God is truly good... Then why does He allow affliction?"*

The psalmist answers that question next and he doesn't do it in the abstract or philosophical, but with his own testimony. In fact, he takes us into God's classroom, where some of life's greatest lessons can only be learned through suffering. And this is what he says -

Second: God's Goodness Often Comes to Us Through Loving Affliction (vv. 67-71)

Now the psalmist tells us his story, and this is the heart of the stanza. He moves from his practical theology to his personal testimony.

Notice the progression.

- Before affliction... - *"I went astray."*
- After affliction... - *"I keep your word."*

- Looking back... *"It was good for me."*

That is one of the most remarkable progressions in all of Psalm 119.

- It is one thing to say, *"God sustained me through affliction."*
- It is another to say, *"God used affliction."*
- But the psalmist says something even much stronger. *"It was good for me."*

How could he possibly say that? Because he has learned to distinguish between what is *pleasant* and what is *profitable*.

- God is not primarily committed to our comfort.
- He is committed to our conformity to Christ.

That is why Romans 8:28 cannot be separated from Romans 8:29

V 28 - *"...all things work together for good..."*

Well, what is that good?

V 29 - *"...to be conformed to the image of his Son."*

Sometimes God's greatest goodness comes disguised as our greatest difficulty. The cross is the clearest and greatest example of this.

a) Affliction exposed his wandering heart - *"Before I was afflicted I went astray..."* (67).

Notice his honesty.

- He doesn't blame someone else.
- He doesn't blame his circumstances.
- He doesn't blame Satan.
- He blames himself.

He says, *"I went astray."*

The word pictures a sheep wandering from the shepherd's path. This is not necessarily rebellion as much as it is drift. Sheep tend to keep their heads down and don't look where they are going.

And isn't that usually how it happens? Rarely does someone wake up and decide, *"I'm going to abandon God today."* Instead...

- Prayer slowly disappears.
- Bible reading becomes occasional.
- Church attendance becomes optional.

- Hanging out with Christians becomes sporadic.
- Sin becomes tolerable.
- Our conscience grows quieter.
- The heart eventually drifts.

ILL: One of the dangers of drift is that you rarely notice it while it is happening. If you've ever floated in the ocean, you know this. You begin directly in front of your umbrella. The water feels calm. You enjoy yourself. Twenty minutes later you look up and you're a hundred yards down the beach. You didn't swim there. You drifted there.

The Christian life is much the same. The psalmist realized that before affliction ever entered his life, his heart had already begun drifting. Affliction simply exposed what was already true.

IMP: Sometimes suffering doesn't create the problem. It reveals the problem. It exposes where our confidence has quietly shifted away from God. And so,

b) God's goodness expressed itself through discipline.

Verse 68 is the theological center of the entire stanza - *"You are good and do good."*

- Everything before this statement prepares for it.
- Everything afterward flows from it.

Notice what the psalmist does not say. He does not say, *"My life has been good."* He says, *"God is good."* There is an enormous difference.

- Our circumstances fluctuate.
- God's character never does.

He is good. He always has been. He always will be. And because He is good... everything He does ultimately reflects that goodness.

Notice the progression in verse 65 - *"You have dealt well..."*

Verse 68 - *"You are good..."*

Jesus said, *"No one is good except God alone." (Mark 10:18)*

James says, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above..." (James 1:17)*

Everything truly good ultimately flows from God because God is good.

IMP: Now think about what that means. If God is good and God sent affliction, then affliction itself must somehow become an instrument of His goodness.

That doesn't make affliction good in itself.

- Death is still an enemy.
- Disease is still part of the Fall.
- Loss still hurts.
- Tears are still tears.

But God is able to take painful things and employ them for holy purposes.

You know that Hebrews 12 reminds us that the Father disciplines every son whom He loves (Hb 12:6). He disciplines because He loves.

ILL: Every loving parent understands this.

APP: One of God's greatest acts of kindness is refusing to allow His children to remain comfortably distant from Him.

He loves us too much for that.

c) So, affliction accomplished what comfort never could. - *"But now I keep your word."* (67).

71 - "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes."

Notice the connection. Affliction... Learning... Obedience....Treasure

Pain, suffering and heartache become God's most influential teachers.

There are lessons prosperity simply cannot teach.

- Prosperity often teaches us to depend upon prosperity.
- Success teaches us to trust success.
- Health teaches us to trust health.
- Strength teaches us to trust strength.

Affliction strips those things away.

It asks, *"What remains when everything else is removed?"* The answer is, *"Only God."* And we discover... **He is enough.**

The Puritans frequently spoke about the "sanctified use of affliction," not because suffering is inherently holy, but because God often accomplishes in suffering what ease never produces.

ILL: Think of gold. Gold is refined in fire. Not because fire destroys it. Because fire reveals it. The impurities rise and are taken away. The gold remains.

So, it is with affliction. It burns away

- Misplaced loves.
- False securities.
- Hidden idols.
- Self-reliance.

Until Christ becomes more precious than He was before.

GOSPEL: This is important because no other love can save us.

ILL - One of the remarkable ironies of church history is that one of Christianity's greatest poems about trusting God's providence was written by a man who repeatedly struggled to believe that God loved him.

William Cowper (Cooper) lived from 1731 to 1800. He battled severe depression throughout much of his life. On more than one occasion he attempted suicide. There were long seasons when he felt abandoned by God. Yet this suffering saint gave the church one of its greatest hymns on divine providence.

He wrote,

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.*

*Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will.*

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.*

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

*His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.*

*Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.*

Isn't that exactly what the psalmist is saying?

- Behind affliction stands a good God.
- Behind painful providence stands a loving Father.
- Behind discipline stands saving grace.

The psalmist learned what Cowper later expressed in poetry. God's goodness often arrives in circumstances we would never choose.

d) Opposition confirmed his new affection.

Verses 69-70 introduce another contrast. *"The insolent smear me with lies, but with my whole heart I keep your precepts; their heart is unfeeling like fat, but I delight in your law."*

Notice the contrast.

- Their mouths produce lies.
- His heart produces obedience.
- Their hearts have grown insensitive.
- His heart delights in God's law.

Affliction has changed him. Not merely externally. Internally. Wholeheartedly.

His values have changed.

- His loves have changed.
- His responses have changed.
- He no longer measures life by comfort.
- He measures life by faithfulness.

APP: One of the clearest pieces of evidence of spiritual maturity is not that life becomes easier. It is that obedience becomes more valuable than ease.

Transition: The remarkable thing is that the psalmist still isn't finished.

- Affliction has corrected him.
- Affliction has humbled him.
- Affliction has taught him.

But none of those is the final destination. The journey reaches its summit in verse 72.

The man who once wandered from God now treasures something he never fully appreciated before. God's Word has become worth more to him than all the wealth of this world.

Third: God's Goodness Leads Us to Treasure His Word Above Everything Else (v. 72) - *"The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces."*

This is the summit of the entire stanza.

Notice that the psalmist doesn't conclude by talking about affliction. Nor does he conclude by talking about obedience. He concludes by talking about treasure. That is so very significant. That is the goal.

The goal of God's work in our lives is not merely that we become more obedient people. The Pharisees were outwardly obedient. God's goal is much deeper than that. He intends to reshape what we value most, what we love most.

Remember where this stanza began. *"You have dealt well with your servant..."*

- Then came wandering.
- Then affliction.
- Then discipline.
- Then learning.
- Now we arrive at the destination.

"The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces."

Affliction has not simply changed the way the psalmist behaves. It has changed what he loves.

a) Affliction reordered his loves.

Notice the progression.

- Before affliction - *"I went astray."*
- After affliction - *"I keep your word."*
- Now - *"Your Word is better than wealth."*

There is a progression here.

- God didn't simply correct his feet.
- He transformed his heart.
- He reordered his affections.
- That is always God's purpose.

The Christian life is never merely about behavior modification. It is about heart transformation.

- God is always asking a deeper question than, “*What are you doing?*”
- He asks, “*What do you love?*”

Because whatever captures our love ultimately directs our lives.

This is why Jesus said, “*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (Matt 6:21).

The heart always follows its treasure.

One of the reasons God allows affliction into our lives is because suffering has a remarkable way of exposing false treasures.

We discover how much confidence we had placed in

- our health
- our plans
- our careers
- our savings
- our reputation
- our comfort.

Then, when those things are shaken, God gently teaches us that He alone is unshakable.

IMP: Sometimes God lovingly removes lesser treasures so that we might discover the greatest Treasure.

b) God’s Word became precious because it revealed God Himself.

Notice carefully what the psalmist actually says. - “*The law of your mouth...*”

I love that expression.

- The Scriptures are not merely ancient writings.
- They are the very words that proceed from the mouth of God.
- The Bible is precious because God speaks through it.
- The psalmist doesn’t love parchment.
- He loves the God who speaks through it.

That is why suffering often changes the way we read the Bible. There are passages that seem ordinary during seasons of ease.

Then suffering comes, and suddenly those same verses become life itself. Think about some of them: Psalm 23. Isaiah 41. Romans 8. John 14. Second Corinthians 4. (You have your own).

- They haven't changed.
- We have.

Affliction has taught us to hear the voice of God in ways we never could before.

ILL: Most believers have certain verses they can never read without remembering a particular season of life. Perhaps it was

- a hospital room.
- A funeral home.
- A sleepless night.
- A time of uncertainty.

Those verses became precious because God met you there.

- The suffering was painful.
- But the fellowship with God became unforgettable...transformational.

That is exactly what the psalmist is describing.

c) True wealth is measured by what endures.

The comparison is striking – He writes, “*...than thousands of gold and silver pieces.*”

Think about what he is saying. Suppose someone placed enormous wealth before you. Everything you ever wanted financially.

- Every debt erased.
- Every retirement account full.
- Every financial concern removed forever.

Then suppose beside it they placed one Bible. Which would you choose? The psalmist says, “*I'll take the Bible.*” Not because what is being offered is evil. Those things are a gift from God. But because they have limits.

- Gold can buy medicine.
- It can't buy healing.
- Gold can buy a house.
- It can't buy peace.
- Gold can buy entertainment.
- It can't buy joy.
- Gold can buy influence.
- It can't buy eternal life.
- Gold eventually perishes.
- And so does the life that trusts in anything other than God.

Peter reminds us that even refined gold is perishable, but God's Word endures forever.

"in this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6-7)

Affliction has taught the psalmist to value what lasts.

APP:

- Life is not about what you possess.
- It is about what you prize.

So, ask yourself this week, *"What, if removed from my life, would leave me feeling that life was no longer worth living?"*

If the answer is anything other than the Lord Himself, perhaps God is lovingly teaching us what He taught the psalmist.

- His greatest gifts are not the things He gives.
- His greatest gift is Himself.

So, the journey of this stanza is now complete.

The man who began by confessing God's goodness now treasures God's voice above all the riches of the world. Affliction has accomplished what prosperity never could. It has taught him that **God is enough**.

But, if we're honest, we recognize that no one, except Jesus, has ever lived this stanza perfectly.

Fourth: And This is Where the Gospel Meets Us

Every one of us can identify with the psalmist.

- We've all gone astray.
- Not merely in our actions.
- In our affections.
- We've treasured lesser things more than God.

We've believed that comfort, success, security, relationships, health, or wealth, outright sin, could satisfy what only God can satisfy. Like sheep, we have wandered.

But there is one Person who never did. Jesus Christ is the only Servant who could say without qualification, *"I have never gone astray."*

He never needed affliction to correct Him because He never wandered from His Father's will.

- Every temptation was resisted.
- Every commandment was perfectly obeyed.
- Every moment of His life reflected perfect delight in His Father's Word.

Yet the Father ordained that His perfectly obedient Son should endure the greatest affliction the world has ever known.

- Not because of His sin.
- Because of ours.

Isaiah tells us, *"He was pierced for our transgressions...upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace...and with his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).*

Think about the irony.

- The only One who never needed discipline received judgment.
- The only One who never wandered was treated as though He had.
- The only truly righteous Servant entered the deepest affliction.

Why? So, wandering servants like us could become sons and daughters.

That changes everything. Now when suffering enters the believer's life, it is never God's judgment. Jesus has already borne that.

Romans 8:1 - "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

The cross forever changed the meaning of suffering for the Christian.

- *Before Christ*, affliction often testified to judgment.
- *Because of Christ*, our afflictions become instruments of sanctification.

Again, Hebrews 12:6 tells us that God disciplines those He loves.

- Not as a Judge punishing criminals.
- As a Father training His children.

"For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

That means the Christian never asks,

- *"Is God punishing me?"* The answer has already been given at Calvary. No. Jesus bore that punishment.

Instead, we ask,

- “*What is my Father teaching me?*”

That is a profoundly different question. And yet, the Gospel goes even further.

- The Gospel doesn’t simply explain our afflictions.
- It changes what we treasure.

Remember where the stanza ends.

“The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.”

How can anyone honestly say that? Only because in Christ we have received something infinitely better than gold. We’ve received God Himself.

Peter says, “*...you were ransomed...not with perishable things such as silver or gold...but with the precious blood of Christ*” (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Notice Peter’s comparison: Silver. Gold. Christ.

The psalmist says, “*Your Word is better than gold.*”

Peter says, “*Christ’s blood is more precious than gold.*”

Jesus is the One through whom we come to possess the greatest treasure imaginable: God Himself.

That means the Gospel

- does not merely forgive our wandering.
- It reshapes our worship.

It teaches us to say, “*The Lord is my portion*” (v 57).

And then, “*The law of your mouth is better than thousands of pieces of gold.*”

Because once you possess Christ, everything else finds its proper place. Isn’t that a blessed life?

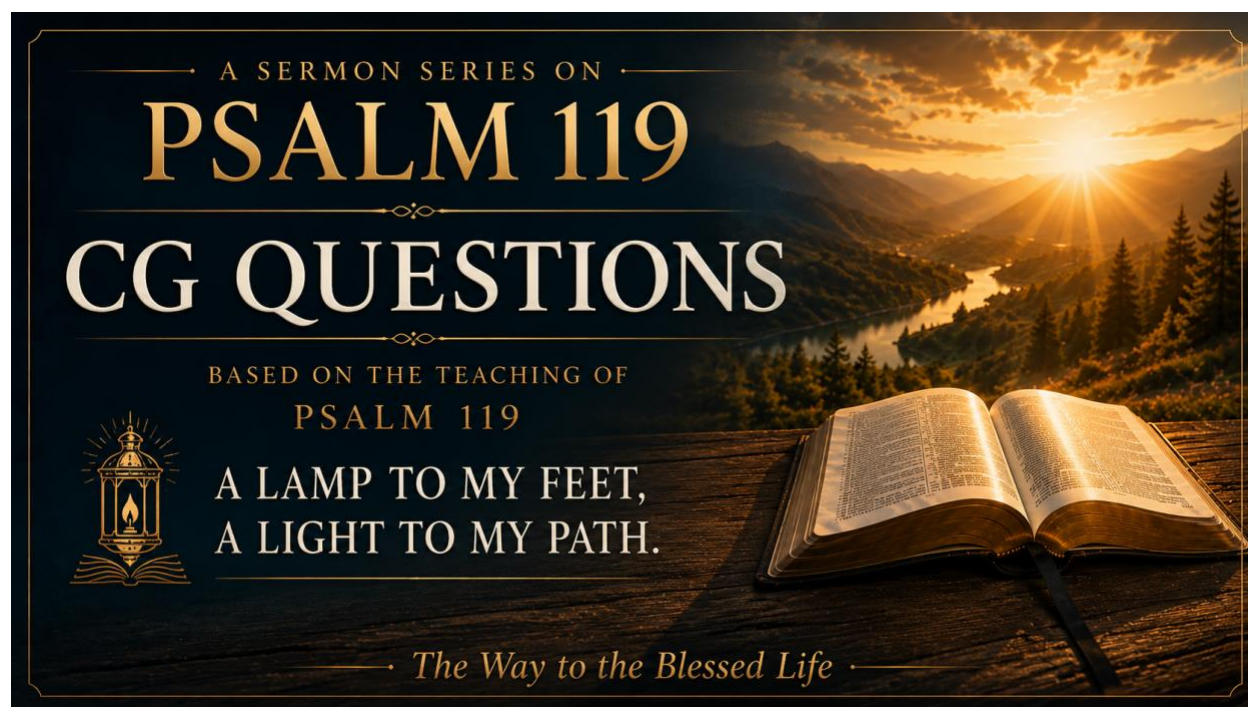
Conclusion: So, notice the parallel: The Psalmist and we

- Go astray.
- Are afflicted.
- Learn God’s Word.
- Treasure God’s Word.

Jesus

- Never went astray.
- Was afflicted for us.
- Is the incarnate Word.
- Gives us Himself as our greatest treasure.

And God uses affliction to teach us that.



Observation

(What does the text say?)

1. What repeated word or idea ties verses 65-71 together, and where do you see it appear?
2. According to verses 65-66, what does the psalmist ask God to teach him?
3. Compare verses 67 and 71. What changed in the psalmist between “before I was afflicted” and “it was good for me that I was afflicted”?
4. How does the psalmist describe the proud in verses 69-70, and how does he describe himself?
5. What comparison does the psalmist make in verse 72, and what does he conclude is more valuable?

Interpretation

(What does the text mean?)

6. Why do you think the psalmist begins this stanza by declaring, “You have dealt well with your servant,” before mentioning his affliction?

7. What does the psalmist mean when he says, “You are good and do good” (v. 68)? How does that statement become the theological center of the stanza?
8. In what sense was affliction “good” for the psalmist? Does he mean that suffering itself is good?
9. Why does affliction often become a greater teacher than comfort in the Christian life?
10. What does verse 72 reveal about what God was ultimately producing in the psalmist’s heart?

Correlation

(How does this passage connect with the rest of Scripture?)

11. Isaiah says, “All we like sheep have gone astray” (Isa. 53:6). How does that verse deepen our understanding of Psalm 119:67?
12. Hebrews 12 teaches that the Lord disciplines those He loves. How does that passage help explain verses 67 and 71?
13. James 1:2-4 tells believers to “count it all joy” when they meet trials. How does James’ teaching parallel the psalmist’s conclusion that affliction was “good”?
14. Peter reminds believers that they were redeemed “not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet. 1:18-19). How does that truth deepen the meaning of verse 72?
15. Romans 8:28-29 teaches that God works all things together for good to conform believers to Christ. How does Psalm 119:65-72 illustrate that promise?

Application

(How should this passage change us?)

16. When difficult circumstances enter your life, are you more likely to interpret your circumstances through God’s character or God’s character through your circumstances? Why?
17. Looking back over your life, can you identify a season of affliction that God used to deepen your faith or redirect your life? What did He teach you?
18. What “lesser treasures” are most likely to compete with God for your heart (comfort, health, reputation, financial security, success, relationships, etc.)? How does affliction expose those competing loves?
19. The psalmist eventually concluded that God’s Word was better than “thousands of gold and silver pieces.” What practical habits can help us treasure God’s Word more than the things of this world?
20. This week’s sermon emphasized that the Christian no longer asks, “Is God punishing me?” but rather, “What is my Father teaching me?” How might asking that second question change the way you face present or future trials?