

Safe in the Fear of God
Psalm 119:113–120
Samekh

Intro: Did you notice the sermon title may appear contradictory? Are we safe in fear? Are we safe because of our fear? The answer is, “Yes,” we are, if what/Whom we are fearing is God.

The safest place to be is knowing the best thing to fear.

- The last stanza lighted the path to the blessed life,
- This one asks, “*Where will the psalmist find security on the path?*”

Notice how much instability surrounds the psalmist. There are

- double-minded people in verse 113,
- evildoers in verse 115,
- wandering people in verse 118,
- wicked people in verse 119.

Yet in the middle of all that instability, the psalmist has found somewhere safe to stand:

“You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in your word.”

That’s the key to this stanza. In the midst of a lot of danger, the psalmist’s security is found in the presence of God. But notice something else equally important. The God in whom the psalmist finds safety is also the God before whom he trembles.

That’s another big movement in the stanza. It goes from: “*You are my hiding place and my shield*” to: “*My flesh trembles for fear of you.*”

Those statements might seem contradictory. How can God be both the One we run to for safety and the One before whom we tremble?

- But that sounds exactly like Job and Isaiah when they saw the Lord.

Job 42:5-6 - I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

Isaiah 6:5 - And I said: ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!’

- That sounds like the disciples in the boat after Jesus calmed the storm.

The storm terrified them, but after Jesus stood and commanded the wind and sea to be still, Mark tells us, “*they were filled with great fear*” (Mark 4:41). Why? They suddenly realized Someone far greater than the storm was in the boat.

And that is precisely what biblical faith teaches us.

- The safest place in all the universe is in the presence of the God we should fear most.
- In fact, we can find refuge in Him because He is fearful.

Big Idea: The blessed life finds its security in God alone,

- trusting Him for refuge,
- depending upon Him for strength, and
- walking before Him in reverent fear.

And you can see those three truths in *Samekh*.

First: God Is Our Refuge Verses 113–115

The stanza begins with a strong statement: “*I hate the double-minded, but I love your law.*”

HB/ “*double-minded*” = *divided thoughts, opinions, or loyalties*. It’s the picture of a heart pulled in competing directions.

James uses similar language: “*...he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways*” (James 1:8).

And there is our problem. A divided heart produces an unstable life.

The psalmist has been learning the importance of a whole heart throughout Psalm 119. The entire psalm began with people who “*seek him with their whole heart*” (v. 2).

Then the previous stanza ended: “*I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end*” (v. 112).

And now this stanza begins: “*I hate the double-minded, but I love your law.*”

So how does a divided heart become a whole heart? The answer is one word: Love.

The psalmist says, “*I love your law.*” (113b)

That is an important principle of spiritual formation. We don’t become wholehearted Christians merely by eliminating competing loves.

*The only way to dispossess [the heart] of an old affection,
is by the expulsive power of a new one.*
- Thomas Chalmers in *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*

The heart needs a greater affection for God to displace lesser loves.

The psalmist loves God's Word, and that love is gathering his scattered heart into a singular devotion to God. That's how spiritual formation works. This is important because,

We become like what we love.
We become what we love.

So, the answer to a divided heart is a deeper love for God and His Word.

And look where that love takes him in verse 114: *"You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in your word."*

Notice how personal that is.

- He doesn't simply say, "God provides a hiding place." He says, "You are my hiding place."
- He doesn't simply say, "God provides a shield." He says, "You are...my shield."

He's applying God's Word personally.

- God is my refuge.
- God is my shield.

IMP: The blessed life grows as what we know to be true about God becomes what we personally trust about God.

And there is a difference between the two pictures.

- A hiding place shelters you from danger.
- A shield protects you in danger.
- Sometimes God hides us from the battle, difficulty, or sorrow.
- Sometimes He protects us while *in* the middle of it.

God is sufficient for both. And that means something very important about Christian security.

- a) We naturally ask God to give us refuge by removing what threatens us. And sometimes He does.
- b) But God can also be our shield while the danger remains.

APP: We all look for hiding places. When life becomes frightening or uncertain, we instinctively search for something that makes us feel secure.

- Some people hide in money.
- Some hide in relationships.
- Some hide in work.
- Some hide in control.
- Some hide in distractions.
- Some hide in their own ability to solve problems.

But none of those things can carry the weight of our ultimate security.

The psalmist says: *“You are my hiding place” (114)*. So,

- Faith doesn’t mean there’s nothing from which we need shelter.
- Faith means we know where to run when we do.

IMP: Your safest place isn’t where trouble can’t find you. In a fallen world, it always will. Your safest place is where trouble can’t separate you from God.

Whatever trouble, heartache, threat, etc., faces you, it all fears God.

Then look at **verse 115**: *“Depart from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commandments of my God.”*

Why is this important? Once the psalmist knows where his security is found, he becomes careful about what might pull him away from it.

The people we allow to influence us can eventually influence the way we walk.

That doesn’t mean Christians isolate themselves from unbelievers. Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners. He loved people who were far from God.

But love doesn’t require us to give everyone equal influence over our hearts.

APP: We should ask ourselves: Who has significant influence over the direction of my life? Are the people closest to me encouraging my obedience to God? What about the voices I invite into my mind every day through social media, entertainment, podcasts, books, and everything else?

You can love everyone without allowing everyone to influence the direction of your life.

Second: God Is Our Strength. 116-117

“Uphold me according to your promise, that I may live” (116). And then, in the very next verse:

“Hold me up, that I may be safe” (117).

- Uphold me. 116
- Hold me up. 117

Do you hear the repetition? The psalmist has made some strong declarations.

- He has rejected double-mindedness.
- He has declared God to be his hiding place and shield.
- He has determined to separate himself from influences that would hinder his obedience.

And then he says, in effect: *“God, I can’t do this unless You hold me up.”* That’s spiritual maturity.

I’ve said this before, but please remember that we sometimes imagine that spiritual maturity means becoming increasingly independent. When we’re new Christians, we need God for everything. Then we grow up spiritually and become strong enough to manage more of life ourselves.

Psalm 119 teaches us something very different. The more spiritually mature we become, the more we recognize how completely dependent on God we have always been.

Jesus said: *“...apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).* Nothing.

Paul said: *“For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10).*

Why?

Because **Christian strength is dependent strength.**

APP: Think about a child learning to walk while holding a parent’s hand. The child really is walking. His feet are taking the steps. But there is a strong hand above him keeping him from falling. That’s a wonderful picture of sanctification.

- God’s sustaining grace doesn’t eliminate our responsibility to walk.
- His grace makes faithful walking possible.

And notice something in verse 117: *“Hold me up, that I may be safe and have regard for your statutes continually!”*

Why does the psalmist want God to hold him up? So he can keep walking.

He isn’t asking God for enough strength to become independent of God. He knows he needs God’s sustaining grace for every step of the journey, just like Israel needed manna every day. Yesterday’s manna wasn’t enough for today.

And yesterday's grace isn't something we store up so that eventually we don't need God anymore.

- We need Him today.
- Then we'll need Him tomorrow.
- Then the next day.
- And the next.

The same Christ who saves us also sustains us. We need Him to sanctify us every day just as much as we needed Him to save us in the first place.

By His Holy Spirit, He strengthens us from within and supplies the grace we need to persevere. That is why the psalmist can simply pray: *"Uphold me."*

Sometimes that may be all you have strength to pray. *"Lord, hold me up."*

- Maybe the burden has lasted longer than you expected.
- Maybe temptation has returned after you thought you had defeated it.
- Maybe grief has drained you.
- Maybe disappointment has discouraged you.
- Maybe opposition has worn you down.
- Maybe you genuinely want to remain faithful, but you're wondering how much longer you can continue.

Psalm 119 gives you a prayer: *"Uphold me."*

And what does the psalmist appeal to? *"Uphold me according to your promise."*

He takes his weakness to God's promise. That's where we should go too.

- Perhaps you need to remember that God will never leave or forsake you – Hb 13:5
- Perhaps you need to remember that His grace is sufficient for you – 2 Cor 12:9
- Perhaps you need to remember that nothing can separate you from His love – Ro 8:38-39

Bring your weakness and His promise together in prayer. And, as you do, remember...

- We love Him because He first loved us.
- We hold on to Him because He is holding on to us.
- We persevere because we are preserved.

Your perseverance doesn't depend on how tightly you can hold on to God. It depends on the God who faithfully holds on to you.

- God is our hiding place.
- God is our shield.
- God is our hope.
- God is our strength
- God is our support

Third: God Is Our Judge. 118-120

Now the tone of the stanza changes - *“You spurn all who go astray from your statutes, for their cunning is in vain. All the wicked of the earth you discard like dross, therefore I love your testimonies” (118-119).*

Those are strong words.

The psalmist has been talking about security. Now he shows us why every security apart from God will eventually fail.

V 118 – People *“go astray”* and live *“in vain.”* They will be discarded like *“dross.”*

That fits our pilgrimage language. God has shown us the path of the blessed life through His Word. These people leave the path.

ILL: Wandering is dangerous because direction matters. We sometimes talk about wandering as though it were spiritually harmless. We call it “backsliding.” And backsliding sounds almost harmless. But you don’t have to fall off a cliff to get lost. You can get lost one step at a time, and you fall off the cliff because you’ve left the path.

Our problem is that,

- We have an amazing ability to make sin sound reasonable.
 - We explain.
 - We rationalize.
 - We minimize.
 - We justify.
 - We tell ourselves our circumstances are unusual.
- Our motives are good.
Someone else is responsible.
 - Obedience costs too much.

Eventually we can become very good at defending what God has already called wrong. But no explanation fools God.

- No manipulation places us beyond His sight.
- No carefully constructed justification turns disobedience into obedience.

- We may deceive other people.
- We may even deceive ourselves.
- But we can't deceive God.

A convincing excuse can never make a wrong path right.

And Jesus gives us a picture of this in **Matthew 7**.

- 1 - One man builds his house on rock.
- 2 - Another man builds his house on sand.
- 3 - And then the storm comes.
- 4 - Notice that the storm comes to both houses.
- 5 - Security doesn't mean the storm never comes.

The question is: *What are you standing on when it does?*

- The sand house stands.
- The rock house falls.

That's the issue in this stanza.

- One person depends on God.
- Another depends on his own cunning.
- One stays on the path God has revealed.
- Another wanders from it.
- Only one is safe.

Then verse 119 gives us another picture: *"All the wicked of the earth you discard like dross."*

ILL: Dross is the impurity removed from metal during refining. The fire reveals what has value and what doesn't.

And the psalmist says there is coming a day when God will do that with everything.

Now, the world constantly tells us what is valuable.

- Success.
- Recognition.
- Possessions.
- Influence.
- Comfort.
- Appearance.
- Achievement.

But God sees the true value of everything. Some things that look enormously important now will one day be exposed as dross. And some things this world barely notices will be shown to have eternal value.

- Quiet obedience.
- Faithfulness.
- Holiness.
- Generosity.
- Prayer.
- Kindness.
- Love for God.
- Love for His Word.

So, here's a good question to ask about the things that consume our attention, energy, money, and affection:

Will this matter in eternity?

And that brings us to the last verse: *"My flesh trembles for fear of you, and I am afraid of your judgments" (120).*

HB/ *"trembles"* = something bristling or standing on end. We might say the hair on your arms stands up.

The psalmist has thought deeply about the judgment of God. And he trembles. That's important. Again, think of Job, Isaiah and the disciples.

The God whose Word he loves is the Judge whose verdicts are always true.

Earlier he said: *"You are my hiding place and my shield" (114).*

Now he says: *"My flesh trembles for fear of you" (120).*

The God before whom the psalmist trembles is the God to whom he runs for refuge. That's biblical fear.

- God is our Father.
- He's our Shepherd.
- He's our Refuge.
- He's our Friend.
- And He's infinitely holy.

This is why Hebrews says: *"let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28–29).*

Grace should deepen our reverence for God. Think about the cross. Our sin was so serious that the Son of God gave Himself to save us from it.

- The cross tells us how deeply God loves sinners.
- And the cross tells us how seriously God regards sin.

Fourth: And here is where the gospel meets us.

Jesus is the only One who lived with a perfectly undivided heart.

- He never wandered from His Father's will.
- He never trusted in human cunning.
- He never sought security apart from His Father.
- And yet at the cross, the One who deserved no judgment bore judgment for people like us who do.
- He bore our sin.
- He bore our judgment.
- He died.
- And He rose again.

So now, all those in Christ can run toward a holy God. Think about that. The Judge has become our Father.

His holiness hasn't diminished. His Son has satisfied His righteous judgment on our behalf. Now, isn't that just glorious?

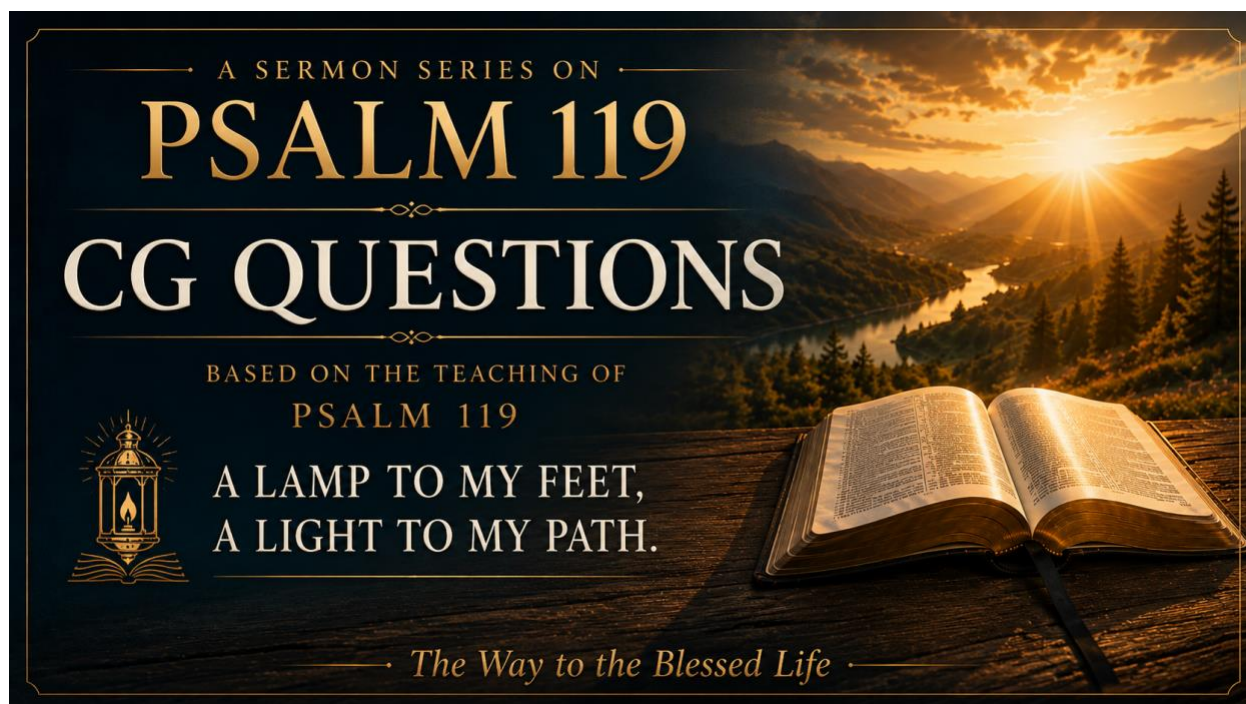
- We can come boldly into His presence.
- And we can tremble in His presence.
- We can call Him Father.
- And we can fall before Him as God.

The God before whom we tremble is the God who invites us to hide in Him. And that brings us back to the strange title of this sermon: **(We are) Safe in the Fear of God.**

Where will you find security on the path of the blessed life? This stanza gives us three answers.

- God is our refuge. When trouble comes, run to Him.
- God is our strength. When you're weak, ask Him to hold you up.
- God is our Judge. Walk before Him with reverence and awe.
- God shelters us.
- God sustains us.
- And God remains God.

So, remember this. Your safest place isn't where trouble can't find you. In a fallen world, it always will. Your safest place is where trouble can't separate you from God. And if you belong to Jesus Christ, nothing ever can.



Observation
(What does the text say?)

1. Read Psalm 119:113–120. What different kinds of instability or danger surround the psalmist in this stanza?
2. What three statements does the psalmist make about God in verse 114?
3. What two requests does the psalmist make of God in verses 116–117? What does the repetition emphasize?
4. According to verses 118–119, what happens to those who wander from God's statutes and trust their own cunning?
5. Compare verses 114 and 120. How does the psalmist describe his relationship with God in each verse?

Interpretation
(What does the text mean?)

6. Verse 113 contrasts double-mindedness with love for God's law. Why does a divided heart produce an unstable life, and how can a greater love for God begin to gather our hearts into a singular devotion?
7. The psalmist calls God both his "hiding place" and his "shield." What is the difference between those two pictures, and what does each teach us about the security God provides?

8. What do the prayers “Uphold me” and “Hold me up” teach us about spiritual maturity and our continuing dependence on God?
9. Why is wandering from God’s path so dangerous even when the first steps away from Him seem small or reasonable?
10. How can the psalmist run to God for refuge in verse 114 and tremble before the same God in verse 120? What does this teach us about biblical fear?

Correlation

(Where else in the Bible can I find this text and interpretation?)

11. Read James 1:5–8. How does James’s description of the double-minded person help us understand Psalm 119:113?
12. Read John 15:4–5 and 2 Corinthians 12:9–10. How do these passages help explain the truth that Christian strength is dependent strength?
13. Compare Psalm 119:120 with Job 42:5–6 and Isaiah 6:1–5. What happens when people begin to see God’s holiness more clearly?
14. Read Mark 4:35–41. Why were the disciples filled with “great fear” after Jesus calmed the storm? How does their response help us understand being safe in the fear of God?
15. Read Matthew 7:24–27. Both houses experience the storm. What determines which house remains standing, and how does Jesus’ illustration reinforce the message of Samekh?

Application

(How can God use this text to sanctify me?)

16. When life becomes frightening or uncertain, where are you most tempted to look for security besides God: money, relationships, control, work, distractions, your own abilities, or something else?
 17. Who or what presently has the greatest influence on the direction of your life? Are those influences encouraging you toward greater love for and obedience to God?
 18. Where in your life do you most need to pray “Uphold me” right now? What promise from Scripture can you bring together with that weakness in prayer this week?
 19. What is one lesser love presently competing with your love for God? What could you do this week to cultivate a greater affection for God rather than simply trying to eliminate the competing love?
 20. The sermon says, “Your safest place isn’t where trouble can’t find you. In a fallen world, it always will. Your safest place is where trouble can’t separate you from God.” What would it look like for you to live according to that truth this week?
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