

PSALM 119

THE ALEPH-TAV JOURNEY
THROUGH GOD'S WORD



My eyes shed streams of tears,
because people do not
keep your law.

PSALM 119:136
(ESV)



Wonderful Words

Psalm 119:129

“Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them.”

Today’s step on our pilgrimage into the blessed life begins with wonder. The psalmist has spent more than half of Psalm 119 talking about God’s Word, yet familiarity hasn’t made it ordinary to him. He says, “Your testimonies are wonderful.” He has read them, studied them, obeyed them, suffered for them, and returned to them again and again. And he is still amazed by them. God’s Word is wonderful to him, so his soul keeps it.

Think

The word translated “wonderful” comes from the Hebrew word *pele’* (פֶּלִיאַ), which describes something extraordinary, marvelous, or beyond the ordinary. The word is often associated with the marvelous works of God. Psalm 78:12 says that God “worked wonders” before Israel’s ancestors in Egypt. Psalm 107 repeatedly calls God’s people to thank Him for His “wondrous works.”

Here in Psalm 119:129, however, the psalmist applies that language to God’s testimonies. What God has said is wonderful because it reveals the God who is wonderful. That’s easy to forget. A Bible can become one of the most familiar objects in our lives. We know where our favorite passages are. We recognize familiar stories. We hear sermons from it week after week. Some of us have been reading it for decades. And familiarity can slowly rob us of wonder. The psalmist has experienced the opposite. The longer he walks with God’s Word, the more precious it becomes.

Notice also the relationship between wonder and obedience. “Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them.” We might say it more naturally this way. God’s testimonies are wonderful, so he keeps them. And he doesn’t merely say, “I keep them.” He says, “my soul keeps them.” His obedience reaches deeper than external conformity. His heart has become involved. He treasures what God has said, and because he treasures it, he wants to live by it.

We often think the answer to weak obedience is simply greater determination. Sometimes the deeper problem is that we’ve lost our wonder. When God’s Word becomes ordinary to us, obedience can begin to feel like duty alone. But when we see the beauty, wisdom, goodness, and grace of what God has revealed, obedience becomes the response of a heart that has discovered something precious.

Reflect

When was the last time something in Scripture caused you to stop and marvel? Think about what you hold in your hands when you open the Bible. The God who created everything has spoken. He has told us who He is. He has told us who we are. He has explained what has gone wrong with the world and with us. He has shown us how sinners can be reconciled to Him. He has told us how to live, how to suffer, how to die, and what waits for His

people beyond death. And He has given those words to us. The wonder isn't merely that the Bible contains profound ideas. The wonder is that through His Word, God has made Himself known.

So, think about this. Has God's Word become so familiar to you that you no longer find it wonderful? Do you approach the Bible expecting to hear from God, or has reading it become something you simply do because Christians are supposed to do it?

And here is where the gospel meets us. The greatest wonder revealed in all of Scripture is Jesus. The Bible's many stories ultimately belong to one great story, the story of God redeeming sinners through His Son. Jesus told His listeners that the Scriptures "bear witness about me" (John 5:39). The eternal Son took on flesh, lived among us, bore our sins at the cross, and rose from the dead. The more clearly we see Jesus in God's Word, the more reason we have to say with the psalmist, "Your testimonies are wonderful." And by His Holy Spirit, God opens our eyes to see that wonder. The Spirit doesn't merely help us accumulate biblical information. He enables us to see the beauty and glory of Jesus revealed in the Word and increasingly shapes our lives by what we see.

Apply

Open your Bible today with one simple request. Ask God to show you something wonderful in His Word. Don't rush. Read Psalm 119:129 again. Then think about a passage of Scripture that has become especially precious to you over the years. Why does it matter to you? What does it reveal about God? What has God taught you through it? How has it changed the way you live?

Then consider whether there is something God has clearly said that you're finding difficult to obey. Instead of beginning with the command, begin with the God who gave it. Remind yourself that His commandments come from His wisdom, His goodness, and His love. Ask Him to restore the connection the psalmist makes between wonder and obedience. "Your testimonies are wonderful," so "my soul keeps them."

And remember this. We're far more likely to keep God's Word when we haven't lost our wonder at the God who gave it.

Pray

If you're unsure how to pray about this, consider praying something like this. Father, Your Word is wonderful because You are wonderful. Forgive me for the times I've allowed familiarity with Scripture to make it seem ordinary. Open my eyes again to the beauty, wisdom, goodness, and grace of what You have spoken.

By Your Holy Spirit, give me a heart that treasures Your Word and a life that keeps it. Help me read slowly enough to see what You've revealed, humbly enough to receive what You say, and faithfully enough to obey it. Restore my wonder when it grows weak.

Thank You most of all for Jesus, the One to whom Your Word points. Thank You that He died for my sin, rose from the dead, and has made it possible for me to know You. As I continue walking the path of the blessed life, let me never lose my wonder at Your Word or at the Savior it reveals. In Jesus' name, Amen.

When God's Word Opens
Psalm 119:130

"The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple."

Today's step on our pilgrimage into the blessed life reminds us that God's Word does something we desperately need. It gives light. We don't naturally see everything clearly. Sin clouds our thinking, experience can mislead us, and our own desires can distort what we want to believe. But when God's Word is opened and understood, light enters. Things that were difficult to see begin to come into focus. The psalmist says that God's Word even gives understanding to the simple.

Think

The word translated "unfolding" carries the idea of something being opened or disclosed. The picture is beautiful. God's Word contains truth, and as that truth is opened before us, light enters. We've seen this image elsewhere in Scripture. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." God's Word doesn't merely tell us where the path is. It enables us to see the path clearly enough to walk it. And notice who receives this understanding. The psalmist says God's Word "imparts understanding to the simple."

The "simple" aren't stupid people. The Hebrew word describes someone inexperienced, untaught, naive, or lacking discernment. The simple person hasn't yet learned to distinguish wisely between truth and error, wisdom and foolishness, the right path and the wrong one. That makes this verse wonderfully encouraging. You don't have to be a scholar to benefit from God's Word. You don't need an advanced degree, an extraordinary intellect, or decades of study before God can teach you. The simple aren't people who can't learn. They're people who need to learn. And God's Word is able to make them wise. Psalm 19:7 says almost the same thing. "The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple."

Of course, this doesn't mean every part of Scripture is equally easy to understand. Some passages require careful study. Peter himself said that some things Paul wrote were "hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16). We should study diligently, ask questions, use good resources, and learn from faithful teachers. But our confidence ultimately rests in something greater than our ability to understand. It rests in God's ability to give light through what He has spoken. The emphasis of verse 130 isn't on how bright the reader is. It's on how much light there is in God's Word.

Reflect

Most of us have experienced the difference between walking through a dark room and turning on the light. The furniture hasn't moved. The room hasn't changed. What changes is our ability to see what was already there. God's Word often works that way in our lives. We may be confused about a decision, a relationship, our priorities, our behavior, or even our own hearts. Then Scripture opens something before us, and suddenly we begin to see differently. Sometimes God shows us that something we thought was harmless is dangerous. Sometimes He

exposes fear we had called wisdom or pride we had called conviction. At other times He shows us that something we feared isn't nearly as frightening when viewed in the light of who He is. The Word gives us God's perspective.

So, think about this. Where in your life do you presently need light? Is there something you're trying to understand by relying mainly on your feelings, your experience, the opinions of others, or your own reasoning? Have you brought that part of your life deliberately under the light of God's Word?

And here is where the gospel meets us. Jesus didn't merely bring light. He said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). We were people walking in spiritual darkness, unable to rescue ourselves or find our way back to God. Jesus entered that darkness, died for our sin, and rose again so that everyone who follows Him "will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." And now the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Scriptures, lives within every believer. He opens our minds to understand God's truth and uses that truth to make us increasingly like Jesus. God hasn't left us wandering in the dark.

Apply

Identify one area of your life where you need greater understanding today. It may involve a decision, a temptation, a relationship, a fear, or simply something about God you don't yet understand. Then open God's Word with a very simple prayer. "Lord, give me light." Don't ask Scripture merely to confirm what you already think. Let it correct you. Let it challenge assumptions you've carried for years. Let God tell you what is true.

And don't become discouraged when you discover how much you still don't understand. Verse 130 was written for people who need understanding. That includes all of us. Keep opening the Word. Keep asking questions. Keep learning. Keep allowing God's truth to illuminate places in your thinking that remain dark.

And remember this. You don't have to know everything to walk wisely. You need enough light to take the next faithful step.

Pray

If you're unsure how to pray about this, consider praying something like this. Father, thank You for giving me Your Word and for the light it brings into my life. You know the places where I'm confused, inexperienced, or easily misled. You also know how often I trust my own understanding instead of looking to You.

By Your Holy Spirit, open Your Word to me and give me understanding. Show me where my thinking needs to change. Give me humility to receive what You say, wisdom to recognize what is true, and courage to walk in the light You provide.

Thank You for Jesus, the Light of the world, who entered my darkness, died for my sin, and rose again to give me life. Keep my eyes fixed on Him and continue using Your Word to guide me along the path of the blessed life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

A Soul That Pants for God's Word

Psalm 119:131

"I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments."

Today's step on our pilgrimage into the blessed life takes us from light to longing. In the previous verse, the unfolding of God's Word gives light. Now the psalmist tells us how deeply he wants that Word. "I open my mouth and pant." He doesn't merely believe God's commandments are important. He longs for them. His language describes an appetite for God's Word that has become almost physical.

Think

The picture in verse 131 is striking. The psalmist opens his mouth and pants because he longs for God's commandments. The language reminds us of Psalm 42:1: "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God." Panting is the language of need. A thirsty animal doesn't casually consider whether it would enjoy some water. It needs water. The psalmist describes his desire for God's Word with that same intensity.

Notice also what he longs for. He says, "I long for your commandments." We don't usually associate commandments with longing. We may respect commandments. We may obey them. We may even recognize that they're good for us. But the psalmist longs for them. Why? Because he has learned something about the relationship between God and His Word. These are "your commandments." He loves the Word because he loves the God who gave it. God's commandments reveal His character, His will, and His wisdom. The psalmist wants to know how God wants him to live because he wants his life to please the God he loves.

That helps us understand why Bible reading is more than gathering information. We're listening to the voice of the God we love. We come to Scripture because we want to know Him, hear Him, and increasingly shape our lives according to what He has said. There's also something encouraging about the psalmist's honesty. Throughout Psalm 119 he has repeatedly asked God to teach him, give him understanding, and incline his heart toward God's testimonies. His appetite for Scripture isn't something he simply takes for granted. He knows his heart needs God's continuing work.

Reflect

Physical hunger usually takes care of itself. Go long enough without eating, and your body will remind you. Spiritual hunger can be different. We can go surprisingly long without feeding our souls and eventually become accustomed to it. Other appetites begin to take over. We reach for our phones, entertainment, news, work, hobbies, or any number of other things almost instinctively, while our Bible can remain unopened. The question isn't whether those things are necessarily wrong. The deeper question is what our appetites reveal about our hearts.

So, think about this. Do you recognize anything of verse 131 in yourself? Do you long to hear from God? When you've gone without meaningful time in His Word, do you miss it? Or has your appetite for Scripture weakened?

Don't read verse 131 merely as a rebuke. Read it as an invitation. God can deepen our hunger for His Word. The same God who gives us His Word can give us a greater desire to hear it.

And here is where the gospel meets us. Our deepest need isn't simply for more biblical information. We need Christ. Jesus described Himself as "the bread of life" and promised, "whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). The Scriptures ultimately lead us to Him. Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead so that sinners who were separated from God could be brought near. By His Holy Spirit, God creates new desires within us. He teaches us to hunger for Jesus, to love what Jesus loves, and to treasure the Word that reveals Jesus to us.

Apply

Pay attention to your appetites today. What do you instinctively reach for when you have a few unoccupied minutes? What do you look forward to? What captures your attention easily? And where does God's Word fit among those desires? If your appetite for Scripture isn't what you want it to be, don't wait until you feel hungry before you begin reading. Appetite often grows as we feed it. Open the Bible. Read slowly. Ask God to speak through what He has already spoken. You might even make the words of verse 131 your prayer: "Lord, make me long for Your Word."

Then act on that prayer. Set aside a specific time today to read Scripture without rushing. Come to it expecting more than information. Come because the God who loves you has spoken, and you want to hear His voice.

And remember this. The blessed life doesn't merely know that God's Word is necessary. It increasingly learns to hunger for it.

Pray

If you're unsure how to pray about this, consider praying something like this.

Father, thank You for giving me Your Word. Forgive me for the times when other appetites have crowded out my desire to hear from You. You know how easily my attention wanders and how quickly my heart can become satisfied with things that can never nourish my soul.

By Your Holy Spirit, deepen my hunger for Your truth. Give me the longing of the psalmist. Teach me to come to Scripture because I love You and want to know You, hear Your voice, and live in a way that pleases You.

Thank You for Jesus, the Bread of Life, who gave Himself for me, died for my sins, and rose again. Satisfy my soul in Him and give me an increasing hunger for the Word that reveals Him as I continue walking the path of the blessed life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Grace for Those Who Love His Name

Psalm 119:132

“Turn to me and be gracious to me, as is your way with those who love your name.”

Today’s step on our pilgrimage into the blessed life moves from longing to grace. The psalmist has just described how deeply he longs for God’s commandments. Now he asks God to turn toward him. “Turn to me and be gracious to me.” He loves God and His Word, but he doesn’t approach God on the basis of what he deserves. He asks for grace.

Think

There’s something deeply personal in the opening words, “Turn to me.” The psalmist doesn’t merely want God to change his circumstances. He wants God’s attention and presence. The request assumes that God sees him, knows him, and cares about what is happening to him. Later, in verse 135, he will pray, “Make your face shine upon your servant.” Both prayers express the same longing. He wants to live consciously under the gracious gaze of God. Then he prays, “be gracious to me.” The Hebrew verb comes from the same family of words associated with grace, favor, and mercy. The psalmist knows that everything he needs from God must ultimately come as a gift.

That’s important because he immediately describes himself as one of “those who love your name.” He loves God. He longs for God’s commandments. Yet he doesn’t say, “Turn to me because I’ve earned Your attention.” He asks for grace. Then comes an encouraging phrase: “as is your way with those who love your name.”

The psalmist knows something about God’s “way.” He has learned how God characteristically deals with His people. God turns toward those who love Him with grace. That doesn’t mean those who love God never suffer. The psalmist himself is suffering. Psalm 119 has made that abundantly clear. God’s gracious attention doesn’t always mean the immediate removal of difficulty. It means that whatever we’re facing, we’re facing it as people who live under the gracious care of God. And notice that the psalmist says he loves God’s “name.” In Scripture, God’s name represents who He is. To love His name is to love Him for who He has revealed Himself to be. The psalmist loves the God whose character he has come to know through His Word.

Reflect

There are times when our greatest need isn’t an explanation. We simply need to know that God sees us. We want Him to turn toward us. That desire can become especially strong when God seems distant. We pray, but nothing appears to change. We read His Word, but our circumstances remain difficult. We may even begin to wonder whether God has noticed what we’re going through.

Verse 132 gives us words for those moments. “Turn to me and be gracious to me.” The psalmist doesn’t pretend that he’s strong enough to handle everything on his own. He asks God for the grace he needs.

So, think about this. Where do you most need God's grace today? Is there some place in your life where you're tempted to believe that God has overlooked you? What would it mean for you to pray simply, "Turn to me and be gracious to me"?

And here is where the gospel meets us. In Jesus, God has turned toward sinners in grace. John says that the eternal Son became flesh and dwelt among us, "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Jesus came near to people who could never make their way to God. At the cross, He bore the judgment our sins deserved, and through His resurrection He opened the way for us to be reconciled to the Father. Because of Jesus, those who belong to Him don't have to wonder whether God will receive them when they come asking for grace. Hebrews tells us to "draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). By His Holy Spirit, God also makes His gracious presence real to us. The Spirit reminds us that we belong to the Father and helps us cry, "Abba! Father!" (Romans 8:15).

Apply

Make verse 132 personal today. Identify the place where you most need God's gracious help. Then tell Him about it plainly. You don't need an impressive prayer. The psalmist gives you one sentence, "Turn to me and be gracious to me." Then resist the temptation to measure God's attention by how quickly your circumstances change. His grace may come through deliverance, but it may also come as strength to endure, wisdom to know what to do, peace while you wait, or the help of another believer who walks beside you.

Most importantly, remember what you already know about God's way with His people. Look back over your life and remember the ways He has sustained you before. Look through Scripture and remember how faithfully He has cared for His people across generations. The God whose grace sustained them is the God to whom you're praying today.

And remember this. You don't have to earn the gracious attention of God. In Jesus, you can draw near and ask for the grace you need.

Pray

If you're unsure how to pray about this, consider praying something like this.

Father, turn to me and be gracious to me. You know everything I'm facing today, including the things I can't explain to anyone else. When You seem distant, keep me from believing that You have forgotten me.

By Your Holy Spirit, help me trust Your character when I can't understand my circumstances. Give me the grace I need for this day. Strengthen me where I'm weak, give me wisdom where I'm confused, and help me rest in Your care.

Thank You for Jesus, through whom I can come boldly to Your throne of grace. Thank You that He died for my sin, rose again, and brought me near to You. Help me live today

knowing that Your face is turned toward me in Christ and that Your grace will be sufficient for every need. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Keep My Steps Steady
Psalm 119:133

“Keep steady my steps according to your promise, and let no iniquity get dominion over me.”

Today’s step on our pilgrimage into the blessed life reminds us that knowing the right path and walking steadily on it are two different things. The psalmist knows God’s Word. He loves it and longs for it. Yet he also knows himself. He knows how easily his steps can wander, so he asks God to steady them. And he knows the power sin can exercise over us, so he prays that no iniquity will gain dominion over him.

Think

The opening words give us the picture of someone walking. “Keep steady my steps according to your promise.” The word translated “keep steady” carries the idea of establishing, directing, or making something firm. The psalmist isn’t asking God merely to show him where to walk. He’s asking God to enable him to keep walking in the right direction. And notice what determines the direction of his steps. He says, “according to your promise.” The ESV footnote gives the alternative translation “according to your word.” The Hebrew word *’imrah* can refer to God’s word, utterance, or promise. Either way, the point is clear. The psalmist wants his life ordered by what God has said. That takes us back to verse 130. God’s Word gives light. But light is meant to be walked in. It isn’t enough to understand what God says. We want His Word to shape the actual steps of our lives.

Then the prayer becomes more urgent: “and let no iniquity get dominion over me.” “Dominion” is the language of rule or mastery. The psalmist understands something about sin that we sometimes underestimate. Sin never wants a small place in our lives. Left unchecked, it seeks mastery. What begins as something we tolerate can eventually become something that controls us. That’s why the psalmist doesn’t merely pray, “Help me avoid the consequences of sin.” He asks God to keep sin itself from ruling him.

There’s humility in that prayer. This is a man who loves God’s Word, yet he doesn’t assume that his spiritual maturity has placed him beyond temptation. The more seriously he takes God’s Word, the more seriously he takes his own vulnerability to sin.

Reflect

Most spiritual wandering doesn’t begin with someone deciding to abandon God altogether. It usually begins with a step. Then another. A compromise that once troubled us becomes easier the second time. Something we once resisted becomes something we tolerate. What we tolerate may eventually become something we defend. Before long, something that once seemed small can begin exercising an influence over us we never intended to give it. That’s why the psalmist asks God to steady his steps.

So, think about this. Is there an area of your life where your steps have become unsteady? Is there a sin you’re beginning to tolerate because it seems small, manageable, or private? Is

something gaining influence over you that you once believed you could control? Don't wait until it has dominion over you before taking it seriously.

And here is where the gospel meets us. Sin once held us under its dominion. But Jesus entered our world, lived the obedient life we failed to live, and at the cross bore the guilt and judgment of our sin. Then He rose from the dead, breaking sin's claim over everyone who belongs to Him. Paul says, "sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:14). That doesn't mean Christians no longer struggle with sin. Psalm 119:133 gives us language for that continuing struggle. But we fight sin as people who belong to Jesus. By His Holy Spirit, God is at work within us, giving us both the desire and strength to keep walking in obedience.

Apply

Think about your steps today. Don't begin by asking where you hope to be spiritually five years from now. Look at the next step. What decision are you making today? What habit are you forming? What are you watching, reading, thinking about, or allowing into your heart? Where are those steps taking you?

If you recognize an area where sin is gaining ground, bring it into the light. Name it before God. Confess it. If necessary, confess it to a mature believer who can pray for you and help you resist it. Then ask God to establish your steps according to His Word. You don't have to walk the entire road today. You do need to take the next step in the right direction. And remember this. Sin seeks dominion one step at a time, and faithfulness is also lived one step at a time. Ask God to keep your next step steady.

Pray

If you're unsure how to pray about this, consider praying something like this.

Father, keep my steps steady according to Your Word. You know my weaknesses and the places where I'm most easily tempted to wander. Forgive me for the sins I've tolerated and the compromises I've allowed to remain in my life.

By Your Holy Spirit, show me where my steps are becoming unsteady. Give me the strength to turn from sin before it gains greater influence over me. Direct my decisions, desires, habits, and relationships according to what You have said. Keep me walking faithfully with You one step at a time.

Thank You for Jesus, who died for my sin and rose again to break its dominion over me. Thank You that I no longer belong to sin. I belong to Him. Keep forming His character within me and steady my steps as I continue walking the path of the blessed life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Free to Obey
Psalm 119:134

“Redeem me from man's oppression, that I may keep your precepts.”

Today's step on our pilgrimage into the blessed life reminds us that sometimes other people can make obedience difficult. The psalmist has already asked God to keep sin from ruling him. Now he asks God to deliver him from the oppression of others. But what stands out is why he wants to be free. “That I may keep your precepts.” He doesn't merely want relief. He wants the freedom to obey God.

Think

“Redeem me” is the language of rescue. The Hebrew verb translated “redeem” can mean to ransom, deliver, or set someone free from another person's power. The psalmist needs that kind of deliverance because he is experiencing “man's oppression.” We don't know exactly what form that oppression took, but it's a recurring experience throughout Psalm 119. The insolent deride him (v. 51). The wicked seek to destroy him (v. 95). Princes sit together and speak against him (v. 23). In the previous stanza he asked God not to leave him to his oppressors (v. 121).

But notice what concerns him most. He doesn't say, “Redeem me from man's oppression so that my life will be easier.” He says, “that I may keep your precepts.” His desire for deliverance is connected to his desire for obedience. There's nothing wrong with asking God to remove suffering. Jesus taught us to pray, “deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:13). Paul sometimes escaped persecution, and at other times he endured it. We're free to ask God to change painful circumstances.

But verse 134 takes us deeper. The psalmist wants his circumstances changed because he doesn't want anything to interfere with his faithfulness to God. That connects beautifully with verse 133. There the danger comes from within: “let no iniquity get dominion over me.” Here the danger comes from without: “Redeem me from man's oppression.” Sin within and pressure without can both pull us away from obedience. So the psalmist asks God for help with both.

Reflect

Other people can exert enormous influence over us. Sometimes it comes through direct opposition. At other times it may simply be our desire for approval. We know what God wants us to do, but we also know what obedience may cost us. Someone may disagree with us, criticize us, exclude us, misunderstand us, or think less of us. Before long, we can find ourselves asking, “What will they think?” before we ask, “What has God said?” The fear of man can become its own kind of oppression.

So, think about this. Is there someone whose opinion of you has become too important? Is fear of someone's reaction making it difficult for you to do something you know God wants you to do? Are you asking God primarily to make your circumstances easier, or are you asking Him to help you remain faithful within them?

And here is where the gospel meets us. Jesus knows what it means to suffer at the hands of men. He was rejected, falsely accused, mocked, beaten, and crucified. Yet He never allowed the opposition of others to turn Him away from obedience to His Father. He was “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). And through that obedience, He accomplished our redemption. Jesus gave Himself to rescue us from a bondage far greater than anything another person can impose on us. He redeemed us from sin and brought us to God. Now, by His Holy Spirit, He gives us the strength to obey even when other people make obedience costly.

Apply

Think about the circumstances you most want God to change today. Ask Him to change them. Ask Him to deliver you. But then add the second half of the psalmist’s prayer: “that I may keep your precepts.” That changes the focus of the prayer. Instead of asking only, “Lord, how can I get out of this?” ask, “Lord, how can I obey You in this?”

If God removes the difficulty, obey Him. If He asks you to remain in it a little longer, obey Him there. Don’t allow another person’s approval, opposition, or expectations to determine your faithfulness.

And remember this. We don’t simply want God to make our lives easier. We want Him to make us faithful.

Pray

If you’re unsure how to pray about this, consider praying something like this.

Father, You know every pressure I’m facing and every way the words, actions, and expectations of others affect me. Where I need deliverance, please deliver me. Where I need courage to remain, give me courage. Above all, keep anything another person does from turning me away from obedience to You.

By Your Holy Spirit, free me from the fear of man. Give me wisdom to know what faithfulness requires and strength to do what You’ve said even when obedience is costly.

Thank You for Jesus, who remained obedient even when sinful men rejected Him and put Him on a cross. Thank You that through His death and resurrection He has redeemed me from sin and brought me to You. Keep me faithful as I continue walking with You on the path of the blessed life. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Let Your Face Shine

Psalm 119:135

“Make your face shine upon your servant, and teach me your statutes.”

Today’s step on our pilgrimage into the blessed life brings together two things we might not immediately connect. The psalmist wants God’s presence, and he wants God’s instruction. “Make your face shine upon your servant, and teach me your statutes.” He doesn’t want to choose between knowing God and knowing God’s Word. For the psalmist, the two belong together. He wants to live in the light of God’s face and learn how to live according to God’s Word.

Think

“Make your face shine upon your servant” would’ve sounded familiar to an Israelite. It echoes the blessing God gave Aaron and his sons to pronounce over His people: “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24–26). For God’s face to shine on someone is a picture of His favor, grace, and presence. The psalmist wants to know that he is living under the gracious smile of God.

But notice what he asks for next. “Teach me your statutes.” That connection is important. If we had written the verse, we might have said, “Make your face shine upon me and take away my problems.” After all, the psalmist has problems. He has just prayed for deliverance from oppression. Instead, he asks God to teach him.

That tells us something about what he believes the favor of God looks like. One evidence of God’s grace in our lives is that He continues to teach us. The psalmist has already learned a great deal. We’re 135 verses into Psalm 119, and he is still praying, “teach me.” Spiritual maturity hasn’t made him less teachable. It has made him more aware of how much he still needs God to teach him. And notice how he describes himself. He calls himself “your servant.” A servant listens to his master. He doesn’t come to God’s Word merely asking whether he agrees with it. He comes ready to receive instruction and obey. So these two requests belong together. “Make your face shine upon your servant, and teach me your statutes.” The God whose face shines upon us is also the God who teaches us how to live.

Reflect

We usually recognize God’s favor by the things He gives us. A prayer is answered. A problem is resolved. A door opens. Something we’ve hoped for finally happens, and we say, “God has been good to me.” And He has. But verse 135 gives us another measure of God’s goodness. God is good to us when He teaches us.

When Scripture exposes something in us that needs to change, God is being gracious. When His Word corrects our thinking, God is being gracious. When He shows us that we’re walking in the wrong direction and calls us back, God is being gracious. We shouldn’t separate God’s favor from God’s instruction.

So, think about this. When you ask God to bless you, what are you asking Him to do? Are you mainly asking Him to improve your circumstances, or do your prayers include, “Teach me”? A teachable heart may be one of the clearest evidences that we’re living in the light of God’s gracious presence.

And here is where the gospel meets us. The fullest revelation of the glory and grace of God comes to us in Jesus. Paul writes that God has shone in our hearts “to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). In Jesus, we see the face of God turned toward sinners in grace. Jesus took our sin upon Himself at the cross and rose again so that we could be reconciled to God. We don’t have to hide from His face. In Jesus, we can draw near. And by His Holy Spirit, God continues to teach us. The Spirit takes the Word He inspired and uses it to form the character of Jesus in us.

Apply

Try praying the two requests of verse 135 together today. “Make your face shine upon your servant.” Ask God to help you live consciously in His presence. Remember that you’re seen, known, loved, and cared for by Him. Then pray, “teach me your statutes.” Open your Bible with a willingness to be taught. Don’t read merely to complete a chapter or gather information. Ask God to show you something about Himself, something about yourself, and something about how He wants you to live.

And when His Word corrects you, don’t resist it. Receive His correction as one of the ways His grace is at work in your life. And remember this. God’s grace doesn’t merely comfort us. It teaches us.

Pray

If you’re unsure how to pray about this, consider praying something like this. Father, make Your face shine upon me. Help me live today with the assurance that I’m known, loved, and cared for by You. Thank You for every expression of Your goodness and grace in my life.

By Your Holy Spirit, keep me teachable. Open my mind to understand Your Word and my heart to receive it. Correct me where I’m wrong, guide me where I’m uncertain, and teach me to live as Your servant.

Thank You for Jesus, in whose face I see Your glory and grace. Thank You that He died for my sin and rose again so that I could be reconciled to You. Let the light of Your presence guide me and Your Word teach me as I continue walking the path of the blessed life. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

When Sin Breaks Your Heart
Psalm 119:136

“My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.”

Today’s step on our pilgrimage into the blessed life ends the Psalm stanza with tears. The psalmist began by calling God’s testimonies wonderful. He has spoken about the light of God’s Word, his longing for God’s commandments, his need for grace, and his desire to walk faithfully. Now he looks at people who reject the Word he loves, and he weeps. “My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.” The closer his heart grows to God, the more deeply he grieves over sin.

Think

The language of verse 136 is unusually strong. The psalmist doesn’t simply say that he is disappointed or troubled. He says, “My eyes shed streams of tears.” The picture is of channels or streams of water flowing from his eyes. His grief is deep. And notice what causes it. “Because people do not keep your law.” He isn’t weeping primarily because of what people have done to him. That would certainly be understandable. Throughout Psalm 119, people have mocked, opposed, slandered, and persecuted him. But here his sorrow reaches beyond what their sin has done to him. He grieves because their sin is against God. That’s an important sign of spiritual maturity.

Earlier in this stanza the psalmist said that God’s testimonies are “wonderful” (v. 129). He longs for God’s commandments (v. 131). He wants his own steps established according to God’s Word (v. 133). Now, because he has learned to love what God loves, he also grieves over what dishonors God. There’s a significant difference between anger over sin and sorrow over sin. We may find it easy to become angry when we see the direction of our culture, the behavior of other people, or the rejection of biblical truth. The psalmist certainly knows righteous indignation. Earlier he said, “Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked, who forsake your law” (v. 53).

But here we see another response. He weeps. Jesus responded similarly when He approached Jerusalem. Knowing that the city would reject Him and knowing the judgment that would follow, “he wept over it” (Luke 19:41). Biblical conviction can produce indignation at evil. But it should also produce compassion for the people enslaved by it.

Reflect

It’s easy to look at a world that rejects God’s truth and become angry. We see beliefs that contradict Scripture. We watch people celebrate things God calls sin. We see the consequences in families, churches, communities, and individual lives. There are times when righteous anger is appropriate. But verse 136 asks us another question. When was the last time the sin around us made us weep?

There's something wrong when Christians can speak harshly about lost people without grieving that they're lost. If our concern is genuinely for the glory of God and the good of others, sorrow should accompany our conviction.

So, think about this. When you see someone living contrary to God's Word, what rises first in your heart? Anger? Frustration? Disgust? Fear? Or is there also grief?

The psalmist's tears aren't evidence that he has become soft toward sin. They're evidence that he has become tender toward people.

And here is where the gospel meets us. Jesus did more than weep over sinners. He died for them. At the cross, Jesus bore the judgment our lawbreaking deserved. He didn't look at sinners from a safe distance and condemn them. He came near. He gave Himself for us. And while we were still sinners, Jesus died for us (Romans 5:8). That means Christians should be able to hold two things together. We can call sin what God calls it while loving sinners enough to grieve over what sin is doing to them. By His Holy Spirit, God can give us that kind of heart.

Apply

Think of someone you know who is living far from God. Before you think about what you might say to that person, pray for them. Ask God to give you His heart toward them. Ask Him to replace contempt with compassion, irritation with concern, and self-righteousness with humility.

Remember that apart from the grace of God, you would be just as lost. Then ask whether there is something God wants you to do. Maybe you need to have a conversation. Maybe you need to share the gospel. Maybe you need to speak the truth about something difficult. Maybe your first responsibility is simply to pray faithfully and love patiently. Whatever you do, let it come from a heart that loves God's truth and loves the person who needs it.

And remember this. The more deeply we love God and His Word, the more deeply we should grieve when people live without them.

Pray

If you're unsure how to pray about this, consider praying something like this.

Father, give me a heart that loves what You love and grieves over what grieves You. Forgive me when I've looked at the sins of others with pride, anger, or contempt instead of compassion. Help me never become comfortable with sin, whether I see it in the world around me or in my own heart.

By Your Holy Spirit, make me tender toward people who are far from You. Give me courage to speak truth when I should speak, wisdom to know how to speak it, and love that makes the truth visible in the way I treat others. Teach me to pray for people before I criticize them.

Thank You for Jesus, who didn't remain distant from sinners but came near to save us.
Thank You that He died for lawbreakers like me and rose again so that we could be forgiven and brought back to You. Give me His heart as I continue walking the path of the blessed life. In Jesus' name, Amen.