

When It's Time for God to Act

Psalm 119:121–128

Ayin

Intro: There are moments we look at what is happening around us, or perhaps what is happening to us, and wonder, “*Lord, when are You going to do something about this?*”

We see something that is wrong. We pray about it. We wait. We try to do what is right. We wait some more. And eventually we find ourselves asking what the psalmist asks in this stanza.

In this stanza, the psalmist is living under the pressure of “*oppressors*” in verse 121 and “*the insolent*” in verse 122. By verse 123, he has waited so long for God to deliver him that his eyes have become weary.

Then something happens in verse 126. His concern becomes larger than what people are doing to him and he prays, “*It is time for the LORD to act, for your law has been broken.*”

He looks around and sees people disregarding God’s Word. And the psalmist knows what is right. He loves what is right. He has tried to do what is right. But he also knows something we sometimes forget. He can’t make everything right. God must act.

That may be one of the most difficult lessons in the Christian life.

There are things God has given us to do, and there are things only God can do.

The blessed life requires knowing the difference.

So, what do we do while we’re waiting for God to do what only God can do?

Big Idea: The blessed life trusts God to act against what is wrong while continuing to love, learn, and live rightly before the Lord.

First: Trust God to Protect You (119:121–123)

The stanza begins with a bold statement, “*I have done what is just and right*” (121).

The psalmist isn’t claiming sinless perfection. This psalm has already shown us a man who knows he needs mercy, instruction, correction, and grace. His claim is much more specific. In this matter, his conscience is clear. He has tried to do what is just and right. And yet he has oppressors.

We sometimes assume that if we do the right thing, the right thing will happen to us. If we obey God, treat people fairly, tell the truth, and make the right decision, we expect other people to respond rightly. Often, they do. Sometimes they don’t.

ILL: * Joseph did what was right when he refused Potiphar’s wife, and he went to prison.

- Daniel faithfully served the king, and jealous men plotted to have him thrown into a lions' den.
- Jesus lived a perfectly righteous life, and he was crucified.

Doing right and being treated right aren't always companions in a fallen world. So, what does the psalmist do? He prays, *"Do not leave me to my oppressors" (121b)*. In other words, he takes the injustice to God.

He doesn't say, *"I've done what is right, so now I'm going to make sure everybody else does what is right."* He asks God to protect him.

Now, that doesn't mean we never confront wrongdoing. It doesn't mean we never correct falsehood, seek justice, protect someone who is being harmed, or take appropriate action.

Waiting on God is never passive.

But the psalmist understands that his ultimate vindication doesn't rest in his hands. He can do what is right. He can't control what happens after he does what is right. That belongs to God.

And then verse 122 takes us one step further - *"Give your servant a pledge of good" (122)*.

The word translated *"pledge"* can carry the idea of becoming surety for someone or standing in their place.

The psalmist is essentially asking, *"Lord, take responsibility for my good."* What an extraordinary prayer.

He has reached the limits of what he can do, so he entrusts what he can't do to God. There is tremendous freedom in learning where our responsibility ends and God's begins.

- You're responsible to obey God.
- You're responsible to tell the truth in love.
- You're responsible to love people.
- You're responsible to repent when you're wrong.
- You're responsible to do what God has placed before you.
- But you can't control another person's heart.
- You can't guarantee how someone will respond to you.
- You can't make everyone understand your motives.
- You can't correct every misunderstanding.
- You can't guarantee tomorrow.
- And you can't make every wrong right.

God never asked you to carry that burden. Don't try to. It's exhausting. Too often we live like this without saying it, *"Today, the part of the Holy Spirit will be played by"*

Verse 123 shows us what happens when we give the outcome to God and God doesn't immediately do what we hoped He would do - *"My eyes long for your salvation and for the fulfillment of your righteous promise."*

The word translated "*long*" carries the sense of being spent or exhausted. The picture is of someone who has been looking down the road for so long that his eyes are tired from looking.

Have you ever waited for someone to arrive? You look down a road or through a window or door but you don't see anyone. A few minutes later, you look again. You hear something and look again. Eventually, you just get tired of looking. You may even imagine things that aren't there. That's the psalmist. And maybe that's you.

- You've prayed for a relationship to change.
- You've prayed for physical healing.
- You've prayed for a prodigal to come home.
- You've prayed for personal direction.
- You've prayed for God to make something right.
- And your eyes are tired.

Psalm 119 doesn't tell us that faithful people never get tired of waiting. It tells us that faithful people keep looking.

- His weary eyes are still looking in the right direction.
- He's tired of waiting, but he hasn't stopped watching.

Weary eyes can still be believing eyes.

Faith doesn't mean we never become weary. Faith means that when we become weary, we keep looking toward the One in whom our hope rests.

The Daily Devotion speaks to this. The psalmist hasn't stopped believing or abandoned God's Word. He is simply tired, and yet he keeps looking to God. The direction is equally important. If we don't look to God, we will look to false gods which will only hurt us in the long run.

Remember,

- You can't and don't have to force the outcome.
- Do what God has given you to do.
- Then trust God to do what only God can do.

Second: Ask God to Teach You (124–125)

a) Now the stanza takes a very important turn - *"Deal with your servant according to your steadfast love, and teach me your statutes" (124).*

- There are oppressors around the psalmist.

- There are insolent people around him.
- There are people who are openly breaking God's law.

If anybody could pray, "*Lord, straighten these people out,*" it's this guy.

But listen to his prayer and watch its focus –

- "*Teach me*" (124b)
- "*give me understanding*" (125).

That, friends, is spiritual maturity.

It's remarkably easy to become an expert on what everyone else needs to learn, how everyone else needs to change, etc.

- We know the books or Bible verses they need to read.
- We know the attitudes they need to change.
- We know what they said.
- We know what they did.
- We know what they should have done.
- And we know how to fix what they've done.

If we aren't careful, we can become so preoccupied with what God needs to do in somebody else that we stop asking what God wants to do in us.

The psalmist refuses to let another person's wrongdoing thwart his own spiritual responsibilities to God.

- "*Teach me your statutes.*"
- "*Give me understanding.*"

That is a prayer worth learning.

- When your marriage is difficult, "*Lord, teach me.*"
- When somebody has hurt you, "*Lord, teach me.*"
- When you're disappointed in your children, "*Lord, teach me.*"
- When you're disappointed in your parents, "*Lord, teach me.*"
- When you're frustrated with another Christian, "*Lord, teach me.*"
- When you're troubled by the church, "*Lord, teach me.*"
- When you look at what is happening in our country, "*Lord, teach me.*"
- That doesn't mean the other person is right.
- It doesn't mean wrongdoing shouldn't be addressed.
- It means someone else's needed change never eliminates my needed change, and there is never a point in this life that I stop changing.

So, the way you live while you wait says everything about:

- The person you are
- What you believe about God

b) Notice the basis on which the psalmist asks God to deal with him - *“According to your steadfast love” – (124b)* That is *hesed*, God’s faithful covenant love.

Three verses earlier he said, *“I have done what is just and right” (121)*. But he doesn’t say, *“Lord, I’ve been good, so deal with me according to what I deserve.”*

Instead, he appeals to the character of God. *“Deal with your servant according to your steadfast love” (124)*.

There’s a great difference between saying,

- *“Lord, in this situation I believe I have done what is right,”* and saying,
- *“Lord, You owe me something.”*

IMP: God doesn’t owe us anything. God doesn’t owe anyone anything. Everything we receive from Him comes by grace.

And notice the repeated word “servant.”

- *“Give your servant a pledge of good” (122).*
- *“Deal with your servant according to your steadfast love” (124).*
- *“I am your servant” (125).*

That’s three times in four verses. The psalmist knows who he is. He belongs to God. And servants need instruction.

So, before he asks God to deal with all the lawlessness around him, he invites God to deal with him. That order matters.

Note: There is something dangerous about being deeply familiar with the Bible. We can begin thinking that because we know the Bible, the Bible’s primary purpose is to help us identify what is wrong with everybody else. No.

- The Word of God must first search me.
- Correct me.
- Teach me.
- Give me understanding.

APP: Some of God’s deepest teaching may take place while we’re waiting for Him to change something we desperately want changed.

So maybe there's someone you've been asking God to change. Keep praying for them. But add another prayer. *"Lord, what do You want to change in me?"*

Or maybe there's a situation you've been asking God to change. Keep praying for it. But add another prayer. *"Lord, what do you want to change in me?"*

Third: Love What God Loves While You Wait for Him to Act (126–128)

Now we come to the climax of *Ayin* - *"It is time for the LORD to act, for your law has been broken."* (126).

There is almost an audacity to those words. Who are we to tell God when it is time for Him to act? But the psalmist isn't commanding God. He's praying. The Bible gives us other prayers like this.

- The psalmist prayed, *"How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?"* (Psalm 13:1-2).
- Habakkuk prayed, *"O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear?"* (Habakkuk 1:2).
- The martyrs in Revelation cry, *"O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge?"* (Revelation 6:10).

Faith doesn't prevent us from asking God when He is going to act. But notice why the psalmist wants God to act. *"For your law has been broken"* (126b).

His concern has grown. Earlier he was concerned because people were hurting him. Now he is concerned because people are dishonoring God.

Something has happened in him while he waited. His concern has moved beyond his comfort to God's glory.

And yet there's another lesson here. The psalmist understands his limits.

- He can do what is just and right.
- He can pray.
- He can wait.
- He can learn.
- But he cannot make everything right.

- Neither can you.
- Neither can I.

- We can't change every heart.
- We can't stop every evil.

- We can't make everybody honor God's Word.
- We certainly can't bring history to its appointed conclusion.

There comes a point when only God can do what only God can do - *"It is time for the LORD to act."*

But now look carefully at verses 127–128 because there are two "therefores."

"It is time for the LORD to act, for your law has been broken."

- ***Therefore I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold.***
- ***Therefore I consider all your precepts to be right; I hate every false way.*** (126-128).

That is a remarkable response.

- Other people break God's Word.
- Therefore, I love it more.
- Other people reject God's ways.
- Therefore, I become more settled in my conviction about God's ways.

The world's rejection of God's Word doesn't diminish the Word's value. It clarifies the psalmist's commitment to it. That is increasingly important for us.

We live in a world that constantly tells us what to value.

- Money.
- Success.
- Recognition.
- Comfort.
- Experiences.
- Influence.
- Possessions.
- Security.

None of those things can bear the weight of becoming our greatest treasure.

- Gold can purchase many things, but it can't tell you why you are here.
- Gold can make life comfortable, but it can't make you holy.
- Gold can provide some security for tomorrow, but it can't tell you what happens when tomorrow never comes.
- Gold can't reconcile you to God.

So the psalmist says, *"I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold"* (127).

And then verse 128 takes it even further - *“I consider all your precepts to be right” (128).*

Don't miss that little word *“all.”*

- He doesn't say, *“I consider the precepts I understand to be right.”*
- He doesn't say, *“I consider the precepts I agree with to be right.”*
- He doesn't say, *“I consider the precepts that don't challenge me to be right.”*
- He doesn't say, *“I consider the precepts that fit comfortably with my culture to be right.”*
- He says, *“all your precepts.”*
- God's Word stands in judgment over us.
- We don't stand in judgment over God's Word.
- That doesn't mean every passage is easy to understand.
- It doesn't mean Christians never disagree about interpretation.
- We study carefully.
- We ask questions.
- We wrestle with difficult texts.

But beneath all of that is a settled conviction. If God has said it, God is right.

The real test of whether we believe the Bible is often when the Bible disagrees with us. Because when Scripture and I disagree, somebody has to change. And it won't be God.

Then comes the final phrase - *“I hate every false way” (128b).*

That sounds strong to modern ears. But notice what he hates. He doesn't say, *“I hate everybody who walks in a false way.”* He hates the way. That distinction matters.

Christians never have permission to despise people who reject God's truth. Jesus commanded us to love even our enemies. But loving people doesn't require us to pretend that a false way is a true way.

In fact, genuine love sometimes requires us to tell someone that the road they are traveling is false because we care about where that road leads.

- A road doesn't become safe because everybody decides to call it safe.
- A false way doesn't become right because it becomes popular.
- God determines what is right.
- His Word marks the straight path.

So here is the great challenge of *Ayin*.

- We can't determine when God will act.
- But we can determine how we will live while we wait.

And when we want God to correct everybody around us, we keep asking Him to teach us. So, this stanza comes down to three words -

- Trust.
 - Teachability.
 - Treasure.
-
- We trust God to protect us.
 - We ask God to teach us.
 - We treasure His Word while we wait for Him to act.

That's the movement that runs through this stanza.

Fourth: And Here Is Where the Gospel Meets Us

- a) No one ever lived this stanza more perfectly than Jesus.

Jesus could say, in a way the psalmist never could completely say, *"I have done what is just and right."*

- He didn't commit any sin.
- He wasn't deceitful.
- Yet He was betrayed.
- Falsely accused.
- Mocked.
- Beaten.
- Condemned.
- Crucified.

And Peter tells us that *"when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly"* (1 Peter 2:23).

Jesus did what was right and entrusted the outcome to His Father. Then came a moment when it appeared that every false way had won. He was dead. His body was in a tomb. His enemies had gone home believing they had succeeded. And then God acted.

On the third day, God raised His Son from the dead.

- The resurrection is God's declaration that sin will not have the final word.
- Death will not have the final word.
- And the greatest treasure God's Word reveals is this risen Christ.

No wonder Peter says we aren't ransomed "with perishable things such as silver or gold," but "with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

- Gold can't redeem you.
- Fine gold can't forgive you.
- All the wealth in the world can't reconcile one sinner to a holy God.

Jesus did what gold could never do.

b) The ultimate "*pledge*" (122) God has given is Jesus.

- He gave Himself for us.
- He rose from the dead.
- And He gives eternal life to everyone who trusts Him.
- And one day God will act again.
- Christ will return.
- Every false way will be exposed.
- Every wrong will be judged.
- Every injustice will be answered.
- Every enemy will be defeated.
- Everything sin has broken will finally be made right.
- Until then, church, we wait.

Conclusion:

But waiting for God to act doesn't mean standing still spiritually.

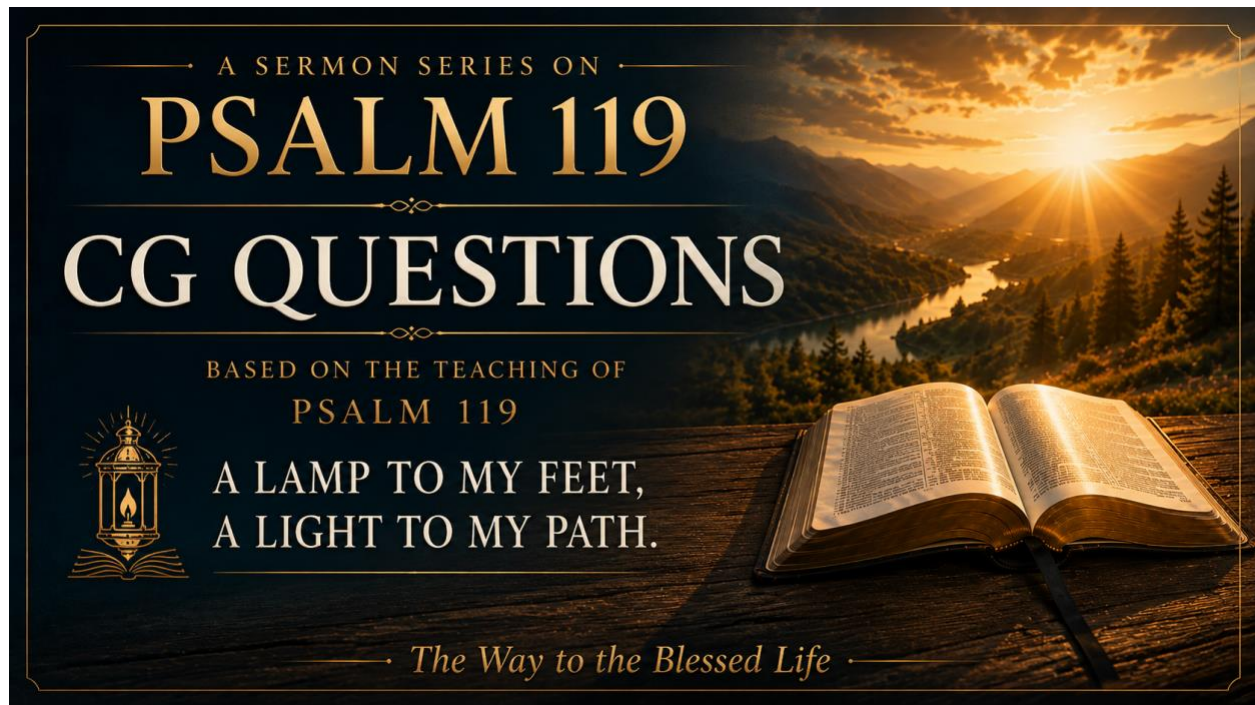
- Keep doing what is just and right.
- Keep looking to God even when your eyes grow weary.
- Keep asking, "*Lord, teach me.*"
- Keep asking Him for understanding.
- Keep loving His Word above fine gold.
- Keep believing that all His precepts are right.
- Keep rejecting every false way.

And when you reach the place where you have done everything God has given you to do, trust Him with what you cannot do.

- There are things you can do.
- There are things only God can do.
- Do what He has given you to do.
- And trust Him to do what only He can do.

The blessed life trusts God to act against what is wrong while continuing to live the blessed life of loving, learning, and living what is right.

And when your eyes grow weary while you wait, keep looking. God knows when it is time for God to act.



A SERMON SERIES ON
PSALM 119
CG QUESTIONS

BASED ON THE TEACHING OF
PSALM 119



A LAMP TO MY FEET,
A LIGHT TO MY PATH.

The Way to the Blessed Life

Observation
(What does the text say?)

1. What does the psalmist say he's done in verse 121, and what's still happening to him?
2. What words in verses 121–123 describe the psalmist's circumstances and emotional condition?
3. What two requests does the psalmist make of God in verses 124–125?
4. According to verse 126, why does the psalmist believe it's time for the LORD to act?
5. What three responses to God's Word do you see in verses 127–128?

Interpretation
(What does the text mean?)

6. What does the psalmist teach us about the relationship between doing what's right and being treated rightly by others?
7. What does verse 123 teach us about faith when we've prayed and waited for God to act for a long time?
8. Why is it significant that, while surrounded by wrongdoing, the psalmist asks God to "teach me" and "give me understanding"?
9. What change do you see in the psalmist's concern between verses 121 and 126?
10. Why do you think the breaking of God's law causes the psalmist to love God's commandments even more in verses 127–128?

Correlation
(What other texts say and mean this?)

11. How do Joseph, Daniel, and especially Jesus demonstrate that doing what is right does not always result in being treated rightly?
12. Read Psalm 13:1–2 and Habakkuk 1:2. What do these passages teach us about bringing our questions about God’s timing to Him?
13. How does 1 Peter 2:23 help us understand what it means to do what is right and then entrust the outcome to God?
14. How does 1 Peter 1:18–19 deepen the contrast in verse 127 between God’s Word and “gold” or “fine gold”?
15. How does the resurrection of Jesus give us confidence that sin, injustice, suffering, and death will not have the final word?

Application
(How can God apply this to me?)

16. Is there something in your life right now that you believe God has given you to do, but you’re still trying to control the outcome?
17. When you become weary waiting for God to answer a prayer or change a situation, where are you most tempted to look instead of continuing to look to Him?
18. Think of a person or situation you want God to change. What might change if you also began praying, “*Lord, what do You want to change in me?*”
19. Where are you presently being challenged to believe that God’s Word is right even when His Word conflicts with what you want, feel, or see around you?
20. What is one thing God has given you to do faithfully this week, and what is one thing you need to stop carrying because only God can do it?