

Wonderful Words, Weeping Eyes

Psalm 119:129–136

Pe

Intro: How dark would it be with the lights off in the sanctuary? Let's 'see.'

LIGHTS OFF

Even though the lights are off, you can probably still make out a few things, but you can't see clearly. The longer we sit in darkness, the more your eyes adjust to the dark, but here, the more aware you also become of how much we depend on light.

Now listen to *Psalm 119:130 - "The unfolding of your words gives light..."*

LIGHTS ON

That's what God's Word does. It gives light. It enables us to see what was there all along, but what we could not see clearly without it. And that picture sits right in the middle of the stanza we're going to study this morning.

We are making our way to the blessed life and there's something striking about the way this stanza begins and ends.

- It begins with wonder. *"Your testimonies are wonderful"* (v. 129).
- And it ends with weeping. *"My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law"* (v. 136).

Those may initially seem like very different responses, but they belong together. The more clearly the psalmist sees the beauty of what God has said, the more deeply he grieves when that Word is rejected.

- He doesn't merely know God's Word.
- He treasures it,
- longs for it,
- asks God to shape his life by it, and finally
- weeps when others disregard it.

And right in the middle of those two responses is an image that may help us understand the entire stanza –

Verse 130 says, "The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple."

God's Word gives light. And once that light enters our lives, we begin to see everything differently.

- We see the wonder of God's truth.

- We see the darkness within ourselves.
- We see our dependence on God's grace.
- And eventually we begin to see the tragedy of a world that rejects God's Word.

These thoughts give us the movement of *Pe*.

Big Idea:

- The Bible gives us light.
- The Bible creates a longing for obedience.
- And the Bible gives us love for a broken world.

First: God's Word Gives Us Light 129–130

*“Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them.
The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.”*

The psalmist begins with wonder because God is ‘wonder full’ and anyone who sees Him acknowledges this.

a) Your testimonies are wonderful

God's Word is wonderful because the God who speaks it is wonderful.

That's something familiarity can cause us to forget.

Some of us have owned a Bible for most of our lives.

- We know the stories.
- We recognize the verses.
- ‘We’ve heard thousands of sermons.
- We know where our favorite passages are.

And one of the dangers of familiarity is that something extraordinary can begin to seem ordinary.

IMP: The book of Hebrews describes Esau as “*unholy*” because he “*sold his birthright for a single meal*” (Hebrews 12:16).

The tragedy is that something extraordinarily valuable became ordinary to him.

Genesis says it even more starkly: “*Thus Esau despised his birthright*” (Genesis 25:34).

But that hasn't happened to the psalmist.

He's lived with God's Word. He's studied it, obeyed it, suffered for it, returned to it again and again, and he still says,

“Your testimonies are wonderful.”

b) And notice what follows - *“Therefore my soul keeps them” (129).*

Or we might say it more naturally, *“Your testimonies are wonderful, so my soul keeps them.”* There’s a relationship between wonder and obedience.

We sometimes assume the solution to weak obedience is simply greater determination.

- Try harder.
- Exercise more discipline.
- Do better.

But sometimes the deeper problem is that we’ve lost sight of God.

When God’s Word becomes ordinary to us, obedience can begin to feel like duty alone. But when God grants us the grace to see His wisdom, beauty, goodness, obedience becomes the response of a heart that has discovered something precious. This is why we pray,

APP: *Psalm 119:18 – “Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.*

c) Verse 130 tells us what happens when this wonderful Word is opened - *“The unfolding of your words gives light.”*

That word “unfolding” carries the idea of opening or disclosing something. And here again, is why we pray,

Jeremiah 33:3 – Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.

Imagine walking into a dark room and turning on the light.

- Nothing in the room necessarily changes when the light comes on.
- What changes is your ability to see what was already there.
- God’s Word does that.
- It gives us God’s perspective. (Seeing life from Scripture; a Christian worldview).

Proverbs 1:7 – The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

- The Bible shows us things about God we couldn’t otherwise know.
- It shows us things about ourselves we might prefer not to know.
- It shows us what is true and false, wise and foolish, righteous and sinful.

d) And that’s why the psalmist says this light *“imparts understanding to the simple.”*

The “simple” aren’t ignorant people. The word describes someone inexperienced, untaught, naive, or lacking discernment. The simple person hasn’t yet learned to distinguish clearly between what is true and false or wise and foolish. That’s why we need the Bible –

2 Timothy 3:16 – “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...”

- Teaching – What is right
- Reproof – What is wrong
- Correction – How to make wrong, right
- Training – How to keep right, right

And that means verse 130 is wonderfully encouraging.

- You don't have to be a scholar to know God.
- You don't need extraordinary intelligence.
- You don't need an advanced degree.
- You need God to open His Word and give you light.

IMP: The emphasis isn’t on how bright the reader is. The emphasis is on how much light there is in the Word.

If your passion is to learn the Bible more, let me give you an encouraging verse -

2 Timothy 2:7 - Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

So where do you need light? Is there an area of your life you’re presently trying to understand primarily through -

- Your upbringing?
- Your traditions?
- Your feelings?
- Your experiences?
- Your education?
- Your own reasoning?
- The opinions of others?

Bring your questions to the light of God's Word.

- Don't ask Scripture merely to confirm what you already think.
- Let it tell you what is true.

And once the light of God's Word begins to enter our lives, something else happens. We begin to want our lives shaped by what we see.

Second: God's Word Creates a Hunger for Obedience. 131–135

a) Verse 131 says, *"I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments."*

Panting is remarkably physical and vivid language, reminding 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 wonder whether a drink of water might be nice. It needs water. So do we (or sweet tea). And that's how the psalmist describes his relationship with God's Word. But notice something important.

His hunger for God's Word doesn't make him self-confident. It makes him dependent. Listen to his prayers in the next few verses.

132 - *"Turn to me." "Be gracious to me."*

133 - *"Keep steady my steps." "Let no iniquity get dominion over me."*

134 - *"Redeem me."*

135a - *"Make your face shine upon your servant."*

135b- *"Teach me."*

The person who increasingly loves God's Word increasingly realizes how much he needs God in order to live it. That's spiritual maturity.

- Maturity isn't reaching the place where you no longer need help.
- Maturity is increasingly understanding how desperately you need it.
- Both from the Father, His Word, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and others.

b) Look at verse 132. - *"Turn to me and be gracious to me, as is your way with those who love your name."*

- He loves God's name.
- He longs for God's commandments.

But he doesn't approach God based on what he deserves. He asks for grace.

Note: Don't you just love that phrase, *"as is your way..."*? God is faithful in spite of our unfaithfulness. And He has already told us how he will respond to us, even in our waywardness.

1 John 1:9 - *"If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

- Faithfulness = He will do it every time
- Just = He won't hold it against us
- Cleanse = justified – just if I'd never sinned

(‘*Just if I’d never sinned*’ is a good way to remember justification, but justification is even better than that. God doesn’t merely regard me as though I’d never sinned. He declares me righteous because the righteousness of Christ is credited to me).

And if all that isn’t good enough...

c) In verse 133 - “Keep steady my steps according to your promise, and let no iniquity get dominion over me.”

He knows where the path is. He also knows he needs God to keep his feet on it.

IMP: And notice the word “*dominion*.” Sin doesn’t want a small place in your life. Sin wants to rule. How does that happen?

- Something we once resisted can become something we tolerate.
- What we tolerate can become something we defend.
- Something we defend can eventually begin exercising control over us.

That’s why the psalmist doesn’t merely pray, “*Keep me from the consequences of sin.*” He prays, “*Let no iniquity get dominion over me*” (133b).

Paul uses remarkably similar language in **Romans 6:14** - “*For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*”

d) Then verse 134 moves from the pressure within him to the pressure around him - “Redeem me from man’s oppression, - that I may keep your precepts.”

- Verse 133 is sin within.
- Verse 134 is pressure without.

And he needs God for both.

But I especially love the reason he asks God to deliver him - “*That I may keep your precepts*” (134b).

- He doesn’t merely want his life to become easier.

ILL: Sign in doctor’s office – ‘*No pain*’ is not a realistic goal. But functioning well despite experiencing some pain is attainable.

- He wants to become more faithful.

That’s a different way of praying. We often pray, “*Lord, get me out of this.*” And there’s nothing wrong with asking God for deliverance.

But Pe teaches us to add another prayer - “*Lord, how can I obey You in this?*”

- If God changes the circumstances, obey Him.
- If God leaves you there a little longer, obey Him there.
- We don't simply want God to make our lives easier.
- We want Him to make us faithful.

e) Then we come to **verse 135** - *“Make your face shine upon your servant, and teach me your statutes.”*

Those words would have immediately reminded an Israelite of the Aaronic blessing:

*“The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face to shine upon you
and be gracious to you”
(Numbers 6:24-26)*

The shining face of God represents His gracious favor and presence.

But look at what the psalmist connects with God's favor - *“Teach me your statutes” (135b).*

We often think God's favor means that He gives us what we want.

- A prayer is answered.
- A problem disappears.
- A door opens.

And those things certainly can be expressions of God's goodness. But verse 135 gives us another expression of His goodness.

God is good to us when He teaches us.

- When Scripture exposes something 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.

And there is something remarkable here. We're 135 verses into Psalm 119. And the psalmist is still praying, *“Teach me.”*

- He hasn't outgrown teachability.
- His maturity has made him more teachable.
- That's what the light of God's Word does.
- It creates a hunger to be shaped by God.

But then *Pe* takes one final step. The light that entered through the Word eventually comes back out through the psalmist's eyes.

Third: God's Word Gives Us Tears for a Broken World. 136

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

- The stanza began with wonder.
- Now it ends with weeping.

And the language is strong - *"My eyes shed streams of tears."* Why? *"Because people do not keep your law."*

IMP: That's striking because this man has plenty of reasons to cry over what people have done to him. Throughout Psalm 119, people have mocked him, slandered him, opposed him, and persecuted him. But that's not what he's crying about here.

He's grieving over what their sin does to God and what sin does to them. And that may tell us something about how deeply God's Word has entered our own hearts.

- We live in a culture where Christians can become very good at identifying what's wrong.
- We can tell you what's wrong with Hollywood.
- What's wrong with Washington.
- What's wrong with schools.
- What's wrong with culture.
- What's wrong with the next generation.
- And sometimes we're right.

The psalmist certainly wasn't indifferent to evil. Earlier he said, *"Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked, who forsake your law" (v. 53).*

- There is such a thing as righteous anger.
- But here he shows us another response to sin.
- He weeps.

APP: When was the last time the sin around you made you cry?

IMP: There's something wrong when we can speak harshly about lost people without grieving that they're lost.

- The psalmist's tears don't mean he's become soft toward sin.
- They mean he's become tender toward people.

Fourth: And here is where the Gospel meets us

We see that perfectly in Jesus. Luke tells us that when Jesus approached Jerusalem and saw the city, *"He wept over it" (Luke 19:41).*

- Jerusalem was rejecting Him.
- Yet Jesus wept.

Jesus had this unique ability to interact with the world with a perfect balance of “*grace and truth*” (John 1:14).

- And then He did something even greater.
- He died.

Jesus didn't merely weep over lawbreakers. He gave His life for them.

- He is the true Light who entered our darkness.
- He perfectly loved and obeyed His Father's Word.
- He wept over those who rejected God.
- And at the cross, the only perfectly obedient Person bore the judgment deserved by lawbreakers like us.
- That includes us.

Romans 5:8 - “...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

- We should never look at a lost world from a safe distance and merely condemn it.
- Jesus came near (He is, *Immanuel/God with us*).

Isaiah 53:3-4 – “He was...a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief...Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...”

- We should do likewise.
- We can call sin what God calls sin and still love sinners.
- We can stand firmly for truth with tears in our eyes.
- We can grieve over what grieves God and destroys people (for both reasons).
- And by His Spirit, God can give us that kind of heart.

Conclusion:

Pe begins with wonderful words and ends with weeping eyes. And between those two things is the transforming light of God's Word - “*The unfolding of your words gives light.*”

- That light enters our minds and teaches us what is true.
- It enters our hearts and creates a longing to be shaped by God.
- And eventually, it reaches our eyes, and we begin to see the world differently.

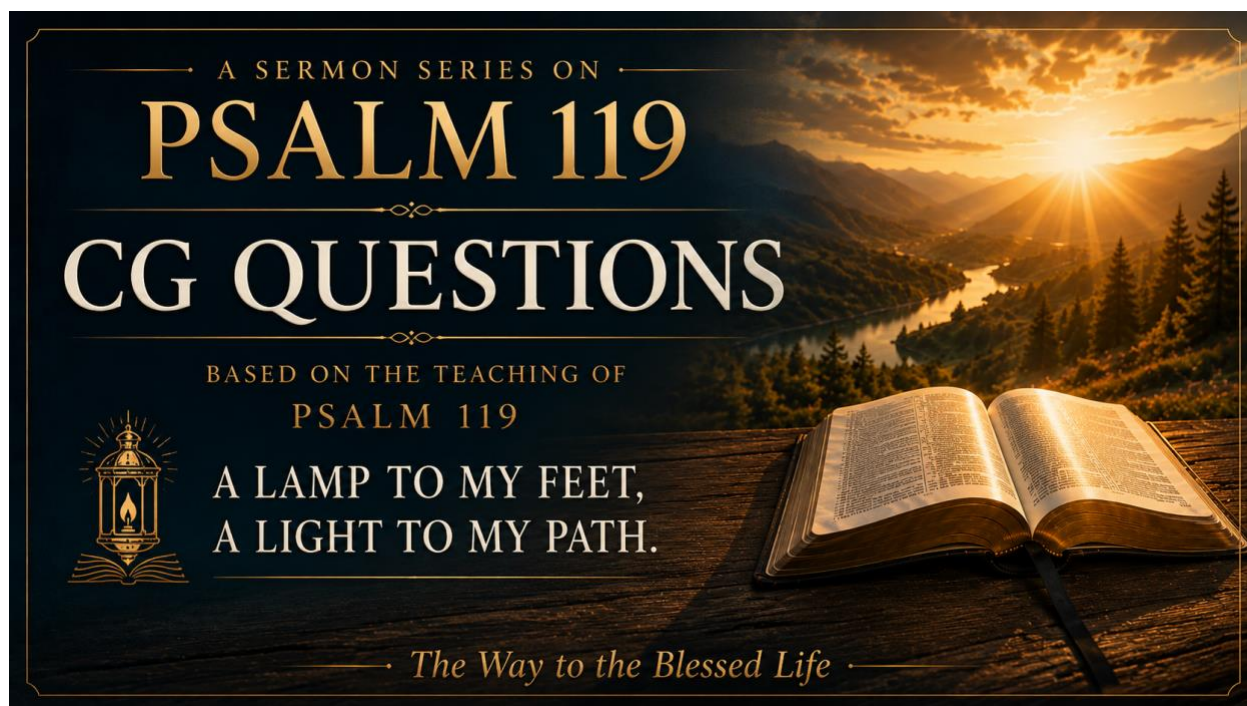
So the movement of *Pe* is simple.

- Light.
- Longing.
- Love.

So, I'd like to end with 3 questions -

- Have you lost your wonder at God's Word?
- Are you allowing God's Word or something else to shape your life?
- When you look at people far from God, do you only see what's wrong with them, or do you weep for them?

The blessed life sees the wonder of God's Word, longs to be shaped by it, and grieves over those who reject it.



Observation — What does the text say?

1. What two responses to God's Word do you see at the beginning and end of this stanza in verses 129 and 136?
2. According to verses 129–130, what does the psalmist say God's Word is and what does it do?
3. What words and images in verses 131–135 reveal the intensity of the psalmist's desire for God and His Word?
4. What specific requests does the psalmist make of God in verses 132–135?
5. According to verse 136, what causes the psalmist to shed "streams of tears"?

Interpretation — What does the text mean?

6. What does the psalmist mean when he says, “The unfolding of your words gives light” (Psalm 119:130)? What kind of darkness does God’s Word help us see through?
7. Verse 130 says God’s Word “imparts understanding to the simple.” What does “simple” mean here, and what does this teach us about our need for God’s Word?
8. Why do you think the psalmist’s longing for God’s commandments in verse 131 leads him to prayer and dependence in verses 132–135 rather than to greater self-confidence?
9. In verse 133, what does the request “let no iniquity get dominion over me” teach us about the nature and danger of sin?
10. What does the movement from wonder in verse 129 to tears in verse 136 tell us about how God’s Word shapes more than what we know? (That’s a glorious question & answer).

Correlation — What other texts say and mean this?

11. How does Psalm 19:7 help us understand the statement that God’s Word “imparts understanding to the simple” (Psalm 119:130)?
12. Compare the psalmist’s longing in Psalm 119:131 with his thirst for God in Psalm 42:1–2. What do these passages teach us about spiritual desire?
13. How does Romans 6:12–14 help us understand the psalmist’s prayer that sin would not have “dominion” over him (Psalm 119:133)?
14. Psalm 119:135 echoes the blessing of Numbers 6:24–26. What does God making His face “shine upon” His people communicate about His relationship with them? How has Jesus fulfilled Moses’ prayer?
15. Compare Psalm 119:136 with Jesus weeping over Jerusalem in Luke 19:41–44. What do both passages teach us about how we should respond to people who reject God and His truth?

Application — How can God apply this to me?

16. Has familiarity with the Bible caused you to lose some of your wonder at God’s Word? What could help you recover that sense of wonder?
17. Where in your life right now do you especially need the light and wisdom of God’s Word?
18. The psalmist asks God to steady his steps and keep sin from ruling him (Psalm 119:133). Is there an area of your life where you need to pray that prayer more intentionally?
19. When you see the sin and brokenness around you, what is your most natural response: anger, criticism, frustration, compassion, grief, or something else? How might Psalm 119:136 reshape that response? (That’s such an important question).
20. Think about the movement of this stanza of light, longing, and tears. Which of those three most needs to grow in your life right now, and what would that growth look like this week?