

God Is Nearer
Psalm 119:145–152
Qoph

Intro: There are some things in life that frighten us more as they get closer.

- A storm out over the ocean may be interesting to watch, but it becomes something different when it's moving toward your house.
- A medical problem becomes something altogether different when the doctor says, "*You have it.*"
- A project or a paper due in six months can be pushed to the back of our minds until it's due tomorrow.
- A difficult conversation can be avoided until the person walks into the room.

Distance changes things. And in this stanza of Psalm 119, trouble is getting closer.

By *v 150* the psalmist says, "*They draw near who persecute me with evil purpose.*"

His enemies have evil intentions, and the distance between them and him is disappearing.

But don't stop reading at v. 150.

Because verse 151 begins with one little word that changes the entire picture - "*But you are near, O LORD.*"

- They are drawing near.
- God is already there.

That may be one of the most important truths we can learn in the blessed life.

IMP: Trouble can get close. Very close. But trouble can never get closer to us than God is already close to us.

And the psalmist doesn't arrive at that confidence suddenly. The whole stanza takes us there.

- He cries to God.
- He hopes in God's Word.
- He meditates on God's promises through the darkness.
- And when his enemies finally draw near, he remembers something greater.
- God is near too.
- Actually, God is nearer.

That's where this stanza takes us.

Big Idea: Because God is near and His Word is forever true, we can cry out to Him with our whole hearts and confidently hope in His promises.

So, I want us to see that in three movements this morning.

First: Cry Out to God with Your Whole Heart (vs 145–146)

Second: Hope in God's Word Day and Night (vs 147–149)

Third: When Trouble Draws Near, Remember God Is Nearer (vs 150–152)

First: Cry Out to God with Your Whole Heart (vs. 145–146)

v 145 - "With my whole heart I cry; answer me, O LORD! I will keep your statutes."

The Hebrew word "I cry" or "I call" describes calling out to someone with urgency. This isn't a casual request. It's more like a 911 call - *"With my whole heart I cry."*

And notice those words, *"with my whole heart."* The Hebrew is two words meaning *"all"* or *"the whole,"* and heart as the inner person, including our thinking, desires, intentions, and will.

- So the psalmist isn't merely describing emotional intensity.
- His whole inner person is turned toward God.

That's important because Psalm 119 has repeatedly described the blessed life as a wholehearted life.

Verse 2 says, "Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart."

Verse 10 says, "With my whole heart I seek you."

Verse 58 says, "I entreat your favor with all my heart."

And now, "With my whole heart I cry."

The blessed life is a wholehearted life.

But that doesn't mean a perfect life.

- You can love God and still struggle with fear.
- You can trust God and still have questions.
- You can want God's will and still be disappointed when His will differs from yours.
- You can believe God is good and still hurt terribly.

We've seen all of that in Psalm 119.

- Wholeheartedness doesn't mean that we never experience conflicting emotions.

- It means that underneath those emotions, the fundamental direction of our heart is toward God.

IMP: Wholeheartedness is the posture of our hearts. When life presses us, our heart leans toward God rather than away from Him.

That's what the psalmist means when he says, *"With my whole heart I cry."*

Life has probably taught you that there are prayers you say, and then there are prayers you cry. And you know the difference.

- There are prayers before meals.
- There are prayers when we begin the day.
- There are prayers we pray because prayer is part of the Christian life.

Thank God for those prayers. But some prayers come from somewhere deeper.

- The doctor says something you never expected to hear.
- Your child is in trouble.
- Someone you love is hurting.
- A relationship is falling apart.
- A grade is a disaster
- You don't know what to do.
- You've reached the end of your resources.

And suddenly prayer isn't merely a spiritual discipline. It's a cry of *"Answer me, O LORD!"* And God isn't offended by prayers like that. In fact, the Bible is filled with them.

"Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!" (Psalm 130:1), David prayed,

"Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer" (Psalm 61:1).

Even Jesus, Hebrews tells us, offered up *"prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears" (Hebrews 5:7).*

Crying to God is not spiritually immature. It shows we know exactly where to go.

But notice where the psalmist's prayer goes - *145b - "Answer me, O LORD! I will keep your statutes."*

That's important. He wants an answer. But he wants an answer, so he knows how to live.

Then he makes it even clearer in v. *146 - "I call to you; save me, that I may observe your testimonies."*

“Save me” = HB = word is hoshi‘eni, from yasha, meaning to save, rescue, or deliver. And that word family should sound familiar to Christians. It’s Yeshua. It’s Jesus. And it reminds us of -

Matthew 1:21 - “You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

NOTE: The great story of the Bible is the story of God saving people who cannot save themselves.

- Noah and the flood, Genesis 6–8. Noah couldn’t survive the coming judgment, so God provided the ark that carried him and his family safely through.
- Israel at the Red Sea, Exodus 14. Israel couldn’t open the Red Sea or defeat Pharaoh’s army, so God made a way where there was no way.
- Israel in the wilderness, Exodus 16–17. Israel couldn’t provide food and water for themselves in the wilderness, so God gave them manna from heaven and water from the rock.
- Gideon and the Midianites, Judges 7. Gideon’s three hundred men couldn’t defeat the vast Midianite army, so God won the battle for them.
- David and Goliath, 1 Samuel 17. Israel’s army couldn’t overcome Goliath, so God used a shepherd boy to bring the giant down.
- Jehoshaphat, 2 Chronicles 20. Jehoshaphat couldn’t overcome the armies surrounding Judah, so God told him, “*The battle is not yours but God’s*” (v 15).
- Jonah, Jonah 2. Jonah couldn’t rescue himself from the depths of the sea, so he confessed, “*Salvation belongs to the LORD!*” (v 9).
- The disciples in the storm, Mark 4:35–41. The disciples couldn’t save themselves from the storm, so Jesus spoke and the wind and sea obeyed Him.
- Lazarus, John 11. Lazarus couldn’t walk out of his grave until Jesus called his name and gave him life.
- Our salvation, Ephesians 2:1–5. We couldn’t make ourselves spiritually alive because we were dead in our sins, so God “*made us alive together with Christ*” (v 5).

And that leads naturally into the next stanza where we hear the psalmist pray, “*Plead my cause and redeem me; give me life according to your promise!*” (Psalm 119:154).

Then, notice what the psalmist says - “*Save me, that I may observe your testimonies*”. (146b)

- He doesn’t simply want to be saved from something.
- He wants to be saved *for* something.
- He wants to be saved *to* Someone. (And that’s what the Bible is all about).

Most of us understand the first part that says, “*God, get me out of this.*”

- Save me from this diagnosis.
- Save me from this financial problem.
- Save my marriage.
- Save my child.

- Save me from this person.
- Save me from this situation.

And there's nothing wrong with asking God for deliverance. The psalmist does. But his prayer goes further, saying, *"Save me, that I may observe your testimonies."*

We've learned that the blessed life is a God-centered, Word-centered life and here the psalmist says, *"God, I want Your deliverance so that I can continue living for You."*

APP: Biblical salvation always moves us toward a life with God.

- Jesus doesn't merely save us from Hell.
- He saves us from sin.
- He saves us from ourselves
- He saves us for Himself.
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This is what Paul means in Titus 2:14 when he says that that Christ *"gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession."*

"For himself." That's salvation. We belong to Him.

So maybe there's something you're crying out to God about this morning.

- Ask Him.
- Cry to Him.

There's no virtue in pretending you don't need help.

But add this to your prayer - *"Father, whatever You do in this situation, help me remain faithful to You."*

That may be one of the greatest prayers we ever learn to pray.

- *"Change this if You will."*
- *"Deliver me if You will."*
- *"Answer me as I hope You will."*
- *"But whatever You do, keep my heart close to You."*

That's the prayer of Jesus we're to follow - *Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).*

IMP: Sometimes the greatest answer to our prayer isn't changed circumstances. It's a heart that keeps walking with God through circumstances we never would have chosen.

That brings us to the second movement of this stanza.

Second: Hope in God's Word Day and Night (vs. 147–149)

147 - "I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in your words."

Look at the picture here. It's still dark. The sun hasn't risen. And the psalmist is already awake.

The Hebrew word translated "*I rise before*" means to precede, come before, or anticipate. The psalmist is literally getting ahead of the dawn. Before the morning arrives, he is already seeking God. We don't know what awakened him.

- Maybe he couldn't sleep because of the trouble he describes later in the stanza.
- Maybe anxiety awakened him.
- Maybe he intentionally rose early to pray.

The text doesn't tell us. But it does tell us what he does – *147b - "I cry for help; I hope in your words."*

There's nothing complicated about the prayer. "*Help!*" That's a good prayer. Sometimes it's the only prayer we have.

"Lord save me" (Matthew 14:30).

IMP: notice that his cry is immediately joined to hope. "*I hope in your words.*"

The Hebrew verb means to wait with expectation, to hope confidently because biblical hope isn't mere optimism.

The psalmist isn't saying, "*I think everything will probably work out.*" His confidence rests outside himself. "*I hope in your words.*"

- He doesn't know what the day ahead will bring.
- But he knows what God has said.

This is why it's important to hear, read, study, meditate on and memorize the Bible.

APP: Before circumstances have an opportunity to interpret God for him, God's Word interprets his circumstances.

That's worth learning. How many of us begin living the day before we even get out of bed? Our eyes open and immediately our minds start.

- What do I have to do today?
- What's going to happen in that meeting?
- What did that person mean yesterday?
- What if the test comes back positive?

- What if this doesn't work out?
- What if that happens?

We can live half the day in our imagination before our feet ever hit the floor. The psalmist gives us another way to enter the day.

- Before the news.
- Before the email.
- Before the phone.
- Before the problem.
- Before the opinions of everybody else.
- God has already spoken.

APP: Let God's Word get to your heart before the world gets to it.

The psalmist's hope enters the day before he does.

Then v. 148 takes us in the other direction with the psalmist saying, *"My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promise."*

So do you see the picture?

- Verse 147 = Before dawn.
- Verse 148 = During the night.

Day and night, his mind keeps returning to God's Word.

The Hebrew word translated "*meditate*" means to ponder, muse, thoughtfully turn something over in your mind.

- Biblical meditation isn't emptying the mind.
- It's filling the mind with God's truth until that truth shapes the way we think and respond.

And nighttime is often when we especially need that. Have you ever noticed how problems grow after midnight? Something that seemed manageable at 2:00 in the afternoon can feel enormous at 2:00 in the morning.

- The house is quiet.
- The room is silent.
- The lights are off.

There's nothing to distract you. And your mind works.

- You replay a conversation.
- You revisit a disappointment.

- You imagine what somebody might do.
- You think about what the doctor might say.
- You solve tomorrow's problems five different ways, and none of them have happened yet.

The psalmist's eyes are awake too. But he gives his mind somewhere to go – *148b - "That I may meditate on your promise."*

- He can't necessarily control whether he's awake.
- But he can determine where his waking thoughts rest.

IMP: You may not be able to keep can't wakefulness from coming, but you can keep wakefulness from becoming worry.

Now, that doesn't mean quoting a Bible verse is a magic sleeping pill. Faith doesn't mean denying anxiety. It means giving anxiety some competition. Instead of allowing the problem to circle endlessly through your mind, bring God's promise into your thinking through verses like these -

- *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).*
- *"My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9).*
- *"I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).*
- *"I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).*

Give your mind something true to think about (Philippians 4:8).

And then v *149 - "Hear my voice according to your steadfast love; O LORD, according to your justice give me life."*

Notice the basis of his prayer.

- He doesn't say, "God, hear me because I've been good."
- He doesn't say, "God, answer me because I deserve it."
- He appeals to God's character. "According to your steadfast love."

You know that. That's *hesed*. God's covenant love. His loyal, steadfast faithful love.

And then, *149b - "According to your justice give me life."*

That's interesting. He brings together God's love and God's justice. We sometimes think those things pull in opposite directions. The psalmist doesn't.

- God is perfectly loving.
- God is perfectly just.

And at the cross we see both.

- God didn't overlook our sin.
- His justice is real.
- And God didn't leave us in our sin.
- His love is real.

At the cross, God's justice was upheld and His love was wonderfully displayed.

- Jesus died for us. Love and Justice
- He rose again. Justice and Love

Psalm 85:10 - "Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other."

Romans 3:25–26 - At the cross God demonstrates His righteousness so that He is *"just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."*

And *Romans 8:34* says He is now *"at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."*

Think about that. The psalmist says, *"Hear my voice."*

And that brings us to the great moment in this stanza.

Third: When Trouble Draws Near, Remember God Is Nearer (vs. 150–152)

150 - "They draw near who persecute me with evil purpose; they are far from your law."

"They draw near" - Trouble is getting close. And their intentions aren't good.

The ESV says they *"persecute me with evil purpose."*

The Hebrew word *zimmah* can describe a wicked plan, an evil intention, a deliberate scheme. These people intend harm. So the psalmist isn't imagining the danger. This is real. And that's important.

Biblical faith never requires us to pretend threatening circumstances aren't real or threatening.

- Cancer is frightening.
- Grief hurts.
- Betrayal hurts.
- Financial problems are real.
- Family problems are real.
- People can hurt us.
- Death is an enemy.

Faith doesn't require us to rename those things. The psalmist clearly, honestly says, "They draw near."

But notice the contrast inside v 150 which reads, *“They draw near...”* but *“They are far from your law.”*

- Physically, they’re getting closer to him.
- Spiritually, they’re far from God.
- And their distance from God’s Word explains their behavior.

People who reject God’s truth eventually live without the restraints and direction His truth provides.

But v. 150 isn’t complete without v. 151. And please don’t miss this.

151 - “But you are near, O LORD, and all your commandments are true.”
There it is.

- “They draw near...”
- “But you are near...”

The Hebrew makes this beautiful.

- Verse 150 begins qarvu, *“they draw near.”*
- Verse 151 begins qarov, *“near.”*
- Both come from the same Hebrew root, qarav but they are different.
- They *draw* near.
- You *are* near.

And that’s an important difference.

- The enemies are drawing near.
- God doesn’t have to draw near.
- He is already there.

IMP: Trouble is approaching, but God is already present. This is the great truth of Scripture.

Genesis 7:1 - Go into the ark, you and all your household... (ESV)

Genesis 7:1 - Come thou and all thy house into the ark...” (KJV)

That “*come*” has often been used to emphasize that God was calling Noah into the place of safety with Him. This is because the Hebrew verb בוא (*bo*’) can mean either “come” or “go/enter,” depending on context.

The truth you should take away from *Qoph* is that –

IMP: Whatever is drawing near to you has to enter a time and place where God is already present.

- That doesn't mean it can't hurt you.
- It doesn't mean you won't cry.
- It doesn't mean you won't be afraid.
- It doesn't mean the circumstances will turn out the way you hope.
- It means you will never face them alone.

ILL: Have you ever watched a little child become frightened by something and immediately move closer to his father? The frightening thing hasn't gone anywhere. The child just becomes more conscious of who is standing beside him. And that's what faith does.

- Faith doesn't always remove the frightening thing.
- Faith remembers that God is with us in the frightening thing.

"You are near, O LORD."

Fourth: And This is Where the Gospel Meets Us

Throughout Scripture, God's presence is one of the great assurances He gives His people.

- 1 - God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden (Genesis 3:8).
- 2 - He told Moses, "*My presence will go with you*" (Exodus 33:14).
- 3 - The tabernacle and later the temple visibly reminded Israel that God dwelt among His people.
- 4 - Isaiah promised a coming Son whose name would be Immanuel, "*God with us*" (Isaiah 7:14).
- 5 - Then John says, "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (John 1:14).

Do you see the movement of the Bible? It's really the whole story of the Bible.

- God with His people.
 - God dwelling among His people.
 - God promising to be with His people.
 - And then God the Son takes on flesh and comes near.
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- Jesus entered our world.
 - He walked our roads.
 - He experienced hunger and weariness.
 - He knew rejection.
 - He wept.
 - He grieved.
 - He suffered.

The God who is near came nearer than anyone could have imagined.

And on the night Jesus was betrayed, Matthew tells us that while He was still speaking in Gethsemane, “*Judas came*” (Matthew 26:47).

- Trouble literally drew near to Jesus.
 - Men came carrying swords and clubs.
 - His betrayer came near.
 - His arrest came near.
 - His trial came near.
 - The cross came near.
 - And Jesus didn’t run.
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- He remained faithful to His Father.
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- He willingly went to the cross.
 - There He bore our sin and the judgment we deserved.
 - And on the third day He rose victorious over the worst that sin, evil, Hell, and death could do.

And because Jesus lives, no trouble that draws near to us can separate us from Him. Why not?

At the cross Jesus cried, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Matthew 27:46).

Jesus experienced the judgment our sin deserved so that those who belong to Him will never be abandoned by God.

Then the risen Jesus said, “*I am with you always, to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20).

- And He gave us His Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit doesn’t merely visit us when trouble comes.
- He dwells within us, or as Jesus said,

You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you (John 14:17)

How much nearer could God get?

IMP: One day the story ends exactly where it has always been headed.

Revelation 21:3 says, “*Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people.*”

From Genesis to Revelation, God’s great promise is His presence - “*You are near, O LORD.*”

You may say, “*How can I know that? How can I believe that?*”

Well, notice that v 151b gives us something else - “*And all your commandments are true.*”

The Hebrew word translated “*true*” carries the idea of truth, reliability, firmness, trustworthiness. So when trouble draws near, the psalmist has two great realities.

- God is near.
- God’s Word is true.

IMP: We have God’s presence with us and God’s truth beneath us.

What more does he really need?

Then Qoph ends in 152 - “*Long have I known from your testimonies that you have founded them forever.*”

Notice that word, “*Forever.*”

The psalmist has lived with God’s Word long enough to know something about it. God founded it forever.

- People change.
- Friends change.
- Circumstances change.
- Politics changes.
- Feelings change.
- Troubles change.
- Enemies change.
- God’s Word remains.

And some of you know that personally. You’ve lived long enough to say, “*Long have I known... ” (152).*

- You know some promises differently at seventy than you knew them at twenty.
- You believed them then.
- You’ve lived them now.
- You’ve carried God’s Word through hospital rooms.
- You’ve carried it to gravesides.
- You’ve carried it through disappointments.
- You’ve carried it through prayers that were answered differently than you hoped.
- You’ve carried it through losses you thought you could never survive.
- And somewhere along the way you discovered something, something I mentioned last week.
- You weren’t carrying the Word.
- The Word was carrying you.

And now you can say with the psalmist, *“Long have I known from your testimonies that you have founded them forever” (152).*

Conclusion: So where has Qoph taken us?

First, Cry Out to God with Your Whole Heart (vs. 145–146) - *“With my whole heart I cry.”*

Second, Hope in God’s Word Day and Night (vs. 147–149) - *“I hope in your words.”*

Third, When Trouble Draws Near, Remember God Is Nearer (vs. 150–152) – *“But you are near, O LORD.”*

Maybe something is drawing near to you this morning. Maybe it has already arrived.

- A diagnosis.
- A decision.
- A loss.
- A conflict.
- A disappointment.
- A fear you can’t shake.
- Something you wish you could push farther away.

Don’t pretend it isn’t there. The psalmist didn’t. *“They draw near.”* Name it. Bring it to God. Cry out with your whole heart.

Then give your mind somewhere to stand, as in, *“I hope in your words.”*

And whatever you do, don’t stop reading your life at v. 150 when God has given you v. 151 also.

- *“They draw near...”* That may be true.
- *“But you are near, O LORD...”* That is also true.

And that truth is greater.

- Cancer may be near.
- Grief may be near.
- Failure may be near
- Sorrow may be near
- Trouble may be near.
- The thing you fear may be near.

And one day, unless Jesus comes first, death itself will draw near.

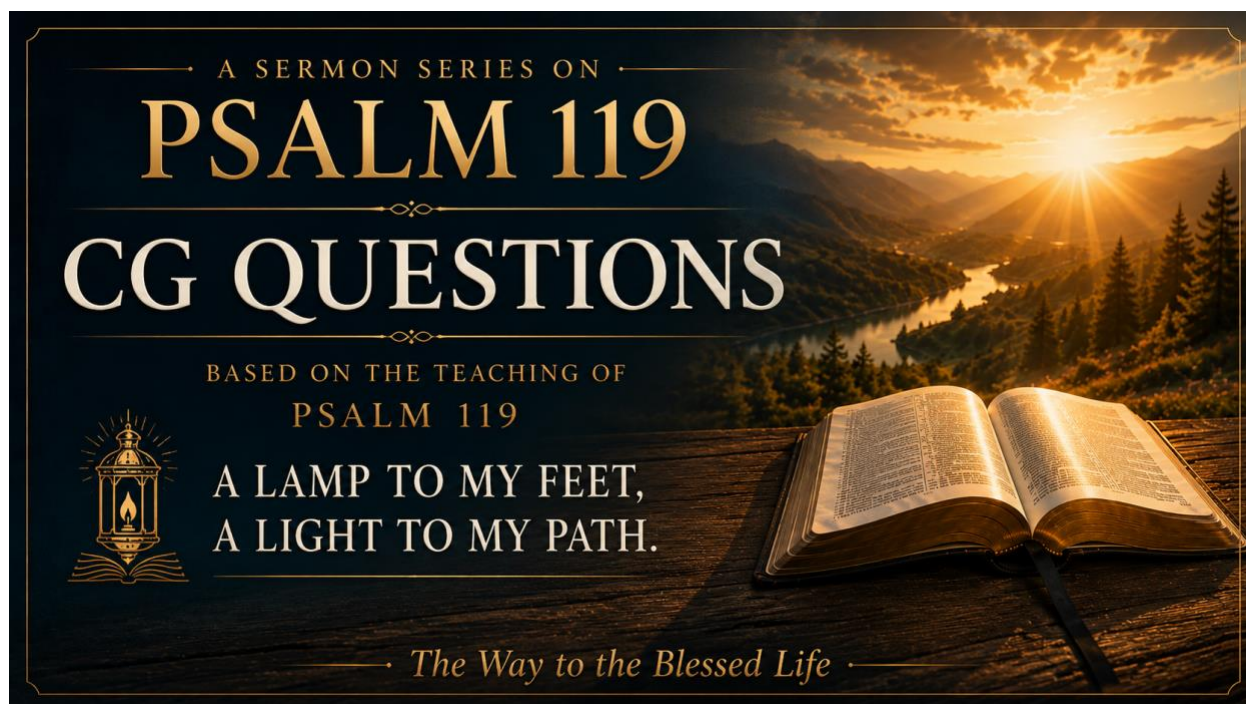
But even there David says, *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.”*

Why? *"For you are with me" (Psalm 23:4).*

That's it.

- God is near.
- His Word is true.
- And His promises are founded forever.

So when trouble draws near, remember this. **God is nearer.**



Observation
What does the text say?

1. In v. 145, how does the psalmist describe the way he cries out to the LORD, and what does he promise to do?
2. According to v. 146, what does the psalmist ask God to do, and what purpose does he give for wanting to be saved?
3. What does the psalmist do before dawn in v. 147, and where does he place his hope?
4. According to vs. 148–149, what does the psalmist do during the night, and what two qualities of God does he appeal to when asking God to hear him?
5. Compare vs. 150–152. Who is drawing near, who is already near, and what does the psalmist say about the permanence of God’s Word?

Interpretation
What does the text mean?

6. What does the psalmist mean when he says, “With my whole heart I cry” in v. 145? How is wholeheartedness different from having perfect faith or no fear?
7. Why is the phrase “that I may observe your testimonies” important in v. 146? What does it teach us about being saved from something and being saved for something?
8. In vs. 147–148, why does the psalmist repeatedly turn to God’s Word both before dawn and during the night? What does this tell us about the relationship between prayer, hope, and meditation on Scripture?
9. Verse 149 appeals to both God’s “steadfast love” and His “justice.” Why can the psalmist confidently appeal to both?

10. What is the significance of the contrast between “They draw near” in v. 150 and “But you are near, O LORD” in v. 151? How does God’s nearness change the way we understand the nearness of trouble?

Correlation

Where else in the Bible do I see this text?

11. Read Psalm 46:1–3. How does the description of God as “a very present help in trouble” reinforce the truth of Psalm 119:151?
12. Read John 14:16–17. Jesus says of the Holy Spirit, “he dwells with you and will be in you.” How does the indwelling Spirit deepen our understanding of what it means for God to be near?
13. Read Romans 3:25–26 and Romans 5:8. How do God’s justice and love meet at the cross, and how does that help us understand the psalmist’s appeal to both God’s steadfast love and justice in v. 149?
14. Read Matthew 26:47 and Matthew 28:20. Trouble drew near to Jesus in Gethsemane, but after His resurrection He promised, “I am with you always.” How does the gospel give Christians confidence when trouble draws near to us?
15. Read Psalm 23:4 and Hebrews 13:5–6. What do these passages teach us about God’s presence when we face fear, suffering, and even death?

Application

How can God use this text to form me?

16. When trouble comes, do you tend to move toward God or away from Him? What would it look like for you to cry to Him “with my whole heart” this week?
17. What usually gets your attention first when you wake up in the morning? How could you allow God’s Word to interpret your circumstances before your circumstances begin interpreting God for you?
18. What thoughts tend to grow larger for you at night? How could meditating on a particular promise of God keep wakefulness from becoming worry?
19. What is “drawing near” to you right now that causes concern, fear, or uncertainty? How does the truth “But you are near, O LORD” change the way you face it?
20. The sermon reminded us, “Don’t stop reading your life at v. 150 when God has given you v. 151 also.” Where are you tempted to see only the trouble that is near and overlook the God who is nearer?