

PSALM 119

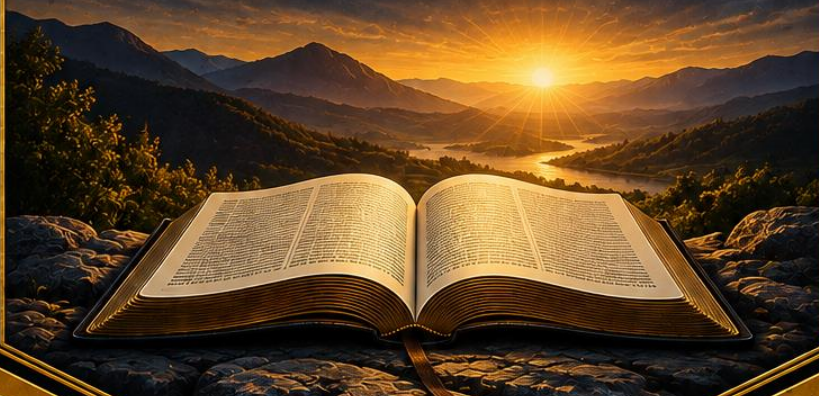
THE ALEPH-TAV JOURNEY
THROUGH GOD'S WORD



RESH

*A Heart Set on
God's Word*

PSALM 119:153-160



Look at Me in My Affliction

Psalm 119:153

“Look on my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget your law.”

Today’s step on our pilgrimage into the blessed life begins with a deeply personal prayer: *“Look on my affliction.”* The psalmist is suffering, and he wants God to look at him. Of course, he knows God can see him. He isn’t worried that his trouble has somehow escaped God’s attention. He wants something more. He wants the God who sees his affliction to enter into it and act on his behalf. So he prays, *“Look on my affliction and deliver me.”* I’ve prayed something like that. So have you. That’s because not every step in the blessed life is an easy one. Still, it’s the blessed life, the best life, and so we journey on.

Think

The Hebrew word translated “affliction” is *‘oni* (עָוִי). It can describe misery, suffering, oppression, or a condition in which someone has been brought low. We’ve encountered this word-family before in Psalm 119 where the psalmist said, *“Before I was afflicted I went astray”* (v 67), *“It is good for me that I was afflicted”* (v 71) and *“I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me”* (v 75).

But here the psalmist isn’t reflecting on what affliction has taught him. He is asking God to do something about it. This is why he says, *“Look on my affliction and deliver me.”* The Hebrew verb translated “look” is *ra’ah* (רָאָה). It ordinarily means to see, look at, or perceive. But in prayers like this one, the idea is more than visual awareness. The psalmist is asking God to see his suffering with compassionate attention. We find something similar when God tells Moses, *“I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt”* (Exodus 3:7). God saw, God knew, and God acted. That’s what the psalmist wants, and so we could say he prays, *“God, see me. See what is happening to me. And please do something.”*

Then he adds, *“for I do not forget your law.”* Affliction hasn’t driven him away from God’s Word. In fact, throughout Psalm 119, affliction has repeatedly driven him deeper into it. That’s worth noticing. Trouble reveals a great deal about where our hearts go for help.

Reflect

Sometimes one of the hardest parts of suffering is wondering whether anybody really sees what we’re going through. People may know something is wrong without understanding how deeply it hurts. They may see the outside of our circumstances without knowing what is happening inside our hearts. And sometimes we don’t want advice. We don’t want an explanation. We simply want someone to see. The good news is that God does and God’s seeing someone or something always implies more than just looking.

So, think about this: Is there some affliction in your life right now that makes you want to say, *“Father, please look at this. See what I’m going through”*? You can pray that.

You don't have to minimize your pain in order to demonstrate your faith. The psalmist doesn't. Jesus didn't.

And here is where the gospel meets us. Jesus is the clearest evidence that God hasn't looked at our suffering from a distance. The apostle John tells us, "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (John 1:14). Jesus entered our world of affliction. He knew hunger, exhaustion, rejection, betrayal, grief, physical suffering, and death. Isaiah calls Him "*a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*" (Isaiah 53:3). God didn't merely see our greatest problem from heaven. In Jesus, He came to us. Then Jesus carried our sins to the cross and rose from the grave. And now, as Hebrews reminds us, we have a High Priest who can "*sympathize with our weaknesses*" (Hebrews 4:15). See? God sees you. On top of that, He has given us His Holy Spirit, who is present with us in every affliction to enable us to live through that sorrow with peace and even joy. So, know this. You are seen. God sees you.

Apply

Tell God specifically what hurts today. You don't need to clean it up before you bring it to Him. "*Father, look on my affliction.*" Then ask Him for deliverance. There is nothing unspiritual about asking God to change painful circumstances. But while you wait, follow the psalmist in one more thing: don't forget His Word. Let suffering send you toward Scripture rather than away from it.

And remember this. You may sometimes feel unseen by people, but you are never unseen by God.

Pray

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

Father, look on my affliction today. You see what others can't see and understand what I sometimes don't want to or can't explain. Thank You that my suffering never escapes Your attention.

By Your Holy Spirit, keep me close to Your Word while I wait for Your help. Protect me from allowing pain to turn my heart away from You. Give me courage to ask You for deliverance and faith to trust You until you do deliver me as you see best.

Thank You for Jesus, who entered our suffering, carried my sin to the cross, and rose again. Thank You that He understands sorrow and that because of Him I can come confidently to You. Keep me walking with Him along the path of the blessed life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Someone to Plead My Cause

Psalm 119:154

“Plead my cause and redeem me; give me life according to your promise!”

Today’s step on our pilgrimage into the blessed life takes us into a courtroom as the psalmist cries *“Plead my cause.”* Things have gotten so bad he feels as though he’s in a courtroom being prosecuted and needs someone to take his case. He needs an advocate. Then he changes the image: *“redeem me.”* He needs someone powerful enough to rescue him. And then comes the prayer we will hear three times in Resh, *“Give me life.”*

Think

The Hebrew verb translated *“plead”* is *riv* (רִיב). It comes from a word used for a dispute, controversy, or legal case. To *“plead my cause”* literally means to take up someone’s case and contend on that person’s behalf. That makes the prayer wonderfully personal. “God, take my case,” he asks.

Then comes the phrase, *“redeem me.”* The Hebrew verb is *ga’al* (גָּאֵל), one of the great redemption words of the Old Testament. A *go’el*, a redeemer, was someone who acted on behalf of another person, often a family member, to rescue, restore, recover, or defend what had been lost. We see that idea beautifully in the story of Ruth and Boaz. Boaz becomes the redeemer who acts on behalf of Ruth and Naomi.

So listen again to the psalmist. “Plead my cause. Redeem me. Give me life.” There are some things the psalmist doesn’t know. But one thing he does know is that he doesn’t believe he has to fight every battle alone. Neither do you.

And notice the basis of his final request: *“according to your promise.”* That’s a really good word for you and me. The psalmist doesn’t ask God to give him life according to his worthiness, performance, or ability to make a persuasive case. God has spoken. He knows what God has said. So, he chooses to trust God’s Word and He asks the Lord to act according to His Word.

Reflect

There are times when you and I feel the need to defend ourselves. Someone misunderstands us. Someone says something about us that isn’t true. Our motives are questioned. Our actions are interpreted in ways we never intended. And almost immediately something inside us wants to build the case, present the evidence, call the witnesses, and make sure everybody understands our side. And there are times we need to speak. Truth matters. But there are also times when we have to entrust our case to God.

So, think about this: Is there some situation in which you are exhausting yourself trying to make everyone understand you? What would it look like to say, “Father, plead my cause”? And here is where the gospel meets us.

This verse almost preaches the gospel by itself. “*Plead my cause.*” Well, John tells us, “*we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*” (1 John 2:1). “*Redeem me.*” The apostle Paul says, “*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses*” (Ephesians 1:7). “*Give me life.*” Jesus says, “*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly*” (John 10:10). Our Advocate became our Redeemer so that we could have life. Are you shouting “glory” yet?

So this is where the gospel meets us. Jesus didn’t plead our innocence. We were guilty. Instead, He took our guilt upon Himself, paid the price of our redemption at the cross, rose again, and now represents us before the Father. And His Spirit bears witness that we belong to God (Romans 8:16). We often wonder how the good news of the gospel can get any better. But it does. It just gets better and better.

Apply

If you’re carrying a situation today in which you feel misunderstood, falsely accused, or unable to make things right, pray the first four words of this verse: “*Plead my cause.*” Do whatever truth and love require of you. Apologize if you’re wrong. Explain when explanation is necessary. Seek reconciliation where possible. Then leave room for God to be your defender. You don’t have to win every argument. You don’t have to correct every misunderstanding. You don’t have to control what everyone thinks about you. Why not? Well,

And remember this. You have an Advocate, a Redeemer, and a Savior. You don’t face life alone and your greatest case is already won.

Pray

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

Father, plead my cause where I need Your defense today. Give me humility to admit when I’m wrong, wisdom to speak when I should, and grace to remain quiet when I should entrust my case to You.

By Your Holy Spirit, free me from the exhausting need to control what everyone thinks about me. Help me walk in truth, love, and faithfulness while trusting You with what I cannot control.

Thank You for Jesus, my Advocate and Redeemer. Thank You that He took my guilt upon Himself, shed His blood for my redemption, rose again, and gives me life. Let His finished work be my confidence today, no matter the situation that faces me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

When Salvation Is Far Away
Psalm 119:155

“Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek your statutes.”

Today’s step on our pilgrimage into the blessed life is the sobering thought that *“Salvation is far from the wicked.”* Yesterday the psalmist asked God to redeem him and give him life. Today he looks at people around him who are living far from that life. And he tells us why this is true of them. “They do not seek your statutes,” he writes.

Think

The Hebrew word translated “*salvation*” is *yeshu‘ah* (יְשׁוּעָה). It can refer to salvation, deliverance, rescue, or victory. Again, you may hear something familiar in that word. *Yeshu‘ah* belongs to the same Hebrew word-family associated with saving and with the name *Yeshua*, Jesus. How many ways has Jesus saved us? How many ways will He save us? Only eternity will reveal the answers.

But another word to particularly notice in this verse is “*far*.” The Hebrew is *rachok* (רָחוֹק), meaning distant or far away. That should sound familiar from the *Qoph* stanza. Just a few verses ago, the psalmist said his persecutors “*are far from your law*” (v 150). Now he says, “*Salvation is far from the wicked.*” Those two statements belong together. Sinners who have yet to trust Jesus are far from God’s Word, and for that reason, salvation is far from them. “*But why*,” you might ask. The psalmist answers, “*For they do not seek your statutes.*”

The issue isn’t that salvation is difficult for God to provide. He has! The problem is the direction of their hearts. They aren’t seeking God. Of course, only the Holy Spirit can awaken our hearts to Jesus and give us the desire to seek Him, but anyone who wants Christ can have Him. Anyone who wants to be saved can be saved. That makes this verse a real warning. God’s Word isn’t merely information to be heard or considered, as someone might do with Sunday morning preaching. Oh no. The gospel calls us toward God Himself. And persistent rejection of God’s truth eventually leaves us far from the life only God can give.

Reflect

C. S. Lewis wisely noted in *The Screwtape Letters* that distance from God usually develops gradually. Most people don’t wake up one morning and decide, “*Today I’m going to move as far away from God as possible.*” It happens a little at a time. It’s a slide and not a cliff. We stop listening. We begin excusing something Scripture confronts. We become comfortable ignoring God in one area of life. Then another. Eventually, what once troubled our conscience no longer troubles us very much. That’s spiritually dangerous.

So, think about this: Is there any area of your life where you have stopped seeking what God says because you already know what you want to do? That’s an uncomfortable question but it’s also a loving one.

And here is where the gospel meets us. The wonderful news of the gospel is that Jesus came looking for people who were far away. Paul tells Gentile believers, “*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ*” (Ephesians 2:13). Did you catch that? Far off. Brought near. How? “*By the blood of Christ.*” Not by anything we’ve done (Titus 3:5). It’s all the work of Jesus, who came “*to seek and to save the lost*” (Luke 19:10). At the cross He paid for our rebellion, and through His resurrection He gives life to everyone who trusts Him. Salvation may be far from those who refuse God, but no sinner is beyond the reach of God’s saving grace. And the Holy Spirit continues to open blind eyes, convict hearts, and draw people to Jesus. That gives us hope while we wait for others to come to Jesus.

Apply

First thing today, examine your own heart. Is there any place where you have become casual about ignoring something God has clearly said? Bring it into the light. God knows it anyway. Confess it. Ask for God’s forgiveness and grace to see sin as He sees it. That’s repentance. Acknowledging my sin and turning to God from it (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

Then think about someone you love who presently seems far from God. Don’t give up on that person. Pray for them today. Then, as you have the opportunity, show love to them. And share the gospel with them when God gives you the opportunity. In the midst of that relationship, remember it’s God who saves. That takes the pressure off of you. But also remember how far God’s grace reached to find you. That will give you hope for the person you love.

And remember this. No one is so far away that Jesus cannot bring them near.

Pray

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

Father, search my heart and show me any place where I have stopped seeking Your will or am living in contradiction to Your Word. Keep me from slowly drifting away from You. Give me a tender heart that wants what You want.

By Your Holy Spirit, convict me where I need conviction and draw me continually toward Jesus. And please work in the lives of those I love who seem far from You. Open their eyes and turn their hearts toward Your truth. While you do that, keep my heart tender toward them.

Thank You for Jesus, who came to seek and save the lost. Thank You that through His blood those who were far away can be brought near. Keep me close to Him as I continue walking the path of the blessed life. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Mercy Bigger Than Our Misery

Psalm 119:156

“Great is your mercy, O LORD; give me life according to your rules.”

Today’s step on our pilgrimage into the blessed life gives us one of the sweetest contrasts in *Resh*. The psalmist is afflicted. He needs deliverance. He is surrounded by wicked people. And then he looks toward God and says, *“Great is your mercy, O LORD.”* And it’s true. God’s mercy is sufficient for the psalmist, for you, and for those you love, no matter how far they may be from God. God’s mercy is endless, and new every morning. Listen to Jeremiah as he shares, *“Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness”* (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Think

The Hebrew expression translated *“Great is your mercy”* is especially beautiful. The word *“great”* is *rav* (רַב), which can mean great, abundant, numerous, or much. But *“mercy”* is actually plural in Hebrew: *rachamekha* (רַחֲמֶיךָ), *“your mercies”* or *“your compassions.”* And indeed, according to Jeremiah, they are never ending. The English translation comes from *racham* (רָחַם), a word-family associated with deep compassion and tender mercy. Interestingly, it is related to *rechem*, the Hebrew word for a womb. The imagery suggests deeply felt, tender compassion. So we might hear the emotional force of the line something like, *“Many are Your compassions, O LORD.”* That matters because another *“many”* is coming in the very next verse.

Here, the psalmist says, *“Many are my persecutors and my adversaries”* (v 157). There are many persecutors. There are many adversaries. But first, God’s mercies are many, great, and abundant. That’s an important lesson for you and me. The psalmist isn’t counting his enemies without first remembering the abundance of God’s compassion. It’s like the apostle Paul’s reminder that *“where sin increased, grace abounded all the more”* (Romans 5:20). Near the end of his life, John Newton said, *“I know two things. I am a great sinner, and Jesus is a great savior.”* How very true. We are great sinners. Jesus is a greater savior.

Then the psalmist prays again, *“give me life.”* This is the second of three times that prayer appears in *Resh*. In v 154, *“give me life according to your promise.”* Here he asks, *“give me life according to your rules.”* And in v 159, he says, *“give me life...according to your steadfast love.”* In other words, God’s Word and God’s character are the ground beneath his prayer for life.

Reflect

Sometimes our problems become easier to count than God’s mercies. We can list what is wrong almost without thinking. This person is against me. That situation is unresolved. This hurts. That worries me. This didn’t turn out the way I hoped. Even our prayers can turn into a list of complaints. And before long, the *“many”* things against us fill our field of vision.

The psalmist teaches us to count differently. Before he says, *“Many are my persecutors,”* he says, *“Great is your mercy.”* It’s like he’s applying the ACTS way to pray of adoration,

confession, thanksgiving and supplication. If you start with God (adoration) by the time you get to your sin (confession) your sin seems small relative to God's grace. And if you start with what God has done (thanksgiving), your petitions (supplication) are also small compared to God's grace.

So, think about this: Which seems greater to you today, the number of your problems or the abundance of God's mercy?

And here is where the gospel meets us. Your problems may really be many. The psalmist's were. But God's mercies are greater. Paul says God is "*rich in mercy*" because of "*the great love with which he loved us*" (Ephesians 2:4). Rich in mercy. There's our verse again. We were dead in sin, but God "*made us alive together with Christ*" (Ephesians 2:5). There's our prayer again. "*Give me life.*" At the cross, Jesus bore the judgment our sins deserved. In the resurrection, He conquered death. And through faith in Him, God makes dead sinners alive. Then His Holy Spirit continues producing the life of Christ within us. This reminds us that God's mercy isn't barely enough. It's rich. It's great. It's abundant.

Apply

Try a different kind of counting today. You may already know how many problems you have. Count some mercies. Name five specific evidences of God's compassion toward you. They don't have to be spectacular. Life. Salvation. Someone who loves you. A prayer God answered. A promise that has carried you. Grace for today. Then pray, "*Give me life.*" Ask God to renew your heart so that you become more conscious of His mercies than consumed by your troubles.

And remember this. Your troubles may be many, but God's mercies are more.

Pray

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

Father, great are Your mercies. Forgive me for the times I count my troubles more carefully than I count Your compassion. Open my eyes to the many ways Your mercy surrounds me every day and help me to count them throughout the day.

By Your Holy Spirit, give me life. Renew what has become tired, discouraged, or spiritually dull within me. Help me face many difficulties with confidence in Your even greater mercy.

Thank You for Jesus and for the rich mercy You have shown me through Him. Thank You that although I was dead in sin, You made me alive with Christ. Keep that resurrection life growing in me as I continue walking the path of the blessed life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

When the Opposition Is Many
Psalm 119:157

“Many are my persecutors and my adversaries, but I do not swerve from your testimonies.”

Today’s step on our pilgrimage into the blessed life acknowledges something the psalmist can count all too easily. *“Many are my persecutors and my adversaries.”* There isn’t just one. There are many. And, as meaningful as the word “many” may be, the most important word in the verse is “but,” as in, “But I do not swerve from your testimonies.” The opposition is many. His direction remains the same. He’s tested God’s Word, found God faithful, and opts to follow God, despite those who oppose him.

Think

Yesterday we saw that God’s mercies are *rav*, great or abundant. Today the psalmist uses the related plural idea *rabbim* (רַבִּים): “many.” Many are his persecutors. Many are his adversaries. I don’t think the placement is accidental in the flow of the stanza. First he speaks about God’s great mercies. Then he talks about his persecutors. The psalmist knows that both exist and he can count both. And God still comes first. That’s important. God should always come first, in anything and everything. That’s the only wise way to count (Proverbs 1:7).

The Hebrew verb translated “swerve” is *natah* (נָטָה). It can mean to stretch out, incline, bend, turn aside, or deviate. The ESV’s “swerve” is a good translation because it gives us a vivid picture. Pressure is trying to push him off course but it doesn’t. That doesn’t mean the psalmist feels nothing. Throughout Psalm 119 he cries, grieves, fears, and asks for help. Faithfulness isn’t emotional numbness. It means opposition doesn’t determine his direction. He keeps his life oriented toward God’s testimonies.

There’s a wonderful lesson there. We don’t always get to decide how much opposition comes against us. We do decide, by God’s grace, what we will trust and what will direct us. You may not recognize it in the moment, but you do that every day.

Reflect

Pressure can make us change direction. Sometimes we change because we’re afraid. Sometimes because we want approval. Sometimes because we’re tired of conflict. Sometimes we simply want life to be easier. And there are moments when changing direction is wise. We should never confuse stubbornness with faithfulness. But there are other moments when the issue is clear. Those are the moments when God has spoken, and His will is clear. The question is whether pressure will move us away from what He has said and we know to be true.

So, think about this: Is there some place where the pressure of people, culture, politics, circumstances, or your own desires is tempting you to swerve from something you know God has said?

And here is where the gospel meets us. Jesus knew what it meant to remain faithful when opposition became overwhelming. Maybe the pressure isn't dramatic. Sometimes a very small turn, continued long enough, takes us a very long way from where we intended to go. Then again, sometimes the pressure is pointed and dramatic. In Jesus' life, religious leaders opposed Him, and political authorities condemned Him. Then, soldiers mocked Him before the crowd called for His crucifixion, and His disciples scattered. If anyone could say it, Jesus could say that many people were against Him. And yet...Jesus didn't swerve. He didn't veer off course. Paul says He "*humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*" (Philippians 2:8). In other words, His obedience was perfect. Ours isn't, so our hope has to rest in Him. Jesus died for every time we've swerved from God's will. He rose again, and now His Spirit lives within us, producing the strength we need to remain faithful when pressure comes.

Apply

Identify one pressure that is presently trying to move you and ask these two questions. Where is this pressure trying to take me? What has God said? Then choose your direction according to God's Word rather than according to the strength of the pressure. You may need courage, patience, wise counsel and certainly the Holy Spirit's help. So don't be afraid to ask Him.

And remember this. You may hear any number of voices contrary to God's Word but His voice is the one that matters.

Pray

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

Father, You know every pressure I face and every voice that can pull my heart away from You. Thank You that Your truth doesn't change according to how many people agree with it.

By Your Holy Spirit, keep me from swerving from Your Word. Give me humility so that I'm teachable, wisdom so that I'm not merely stubborn, and courage when faithfulness requires me to stand.

Thank You for Jesus, who remained perfectly obedient even when opposition led Him to the cross. Thank You that He died for every way I have failed and rose again to give me new life. Keep my life pointed toward Him as I continue walking the path of the blessed life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

When Faithlessness Breaks Your Heart
Psalm 119:158

“I look at the faithless with disgust, because they do not keep your commands.”

Today’s step on our pilgrimage into the blessed life may feel uncomfortable at first. The psalmist begins this verse by writing, *“I look at the faithless with disgust.”* Those are strong words. But before we assume the psalmist is simply angry at people he doesn’t like, notice he feels this way *“because they do not keep your commands.”* Something precious to him is being treated as though it doesn’t matter. And that concerns the psalmist greatly.

Think

The Hebrew word translated “*faithless*” is *bogedim* (בִּגְדִים), from the verb *bagad* (בָּגַד), which means to act treacherously, deal faithlessly, or betray. That’s stronger than simply saying these people occasionally disobey. Faithlessness carries the idea of violated loyalty.

The word translated “*disgust*” is *qut* (קִיט). It expresses loathing, revulsion, or deep abhorrence. That’s strong emotion. We shouldn’t soften it until it says less than Scripture says. But we should understand what provokes it.

The psalmist loves God. He loves God’s Word. So watching people betray God’s truth troubles him deeply. We’ve seen something similar already. In v 136 he said, *“My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.”* That verse helps us understand this one. His response to sin isn’t merely disgust. It includes grief and that combination matters. Biblical zeal should never become self-righteous delight in somebody else’s failure. The psalmist isn’t saying, *“Look how much better I am than they are.”* He is grieved because God’s Word is being rejected and whether or not he loves those who are rejecting it, God’s glory is diminished among the heathen and he knows where such rebellion will end.

Reflect

How do you respond when people reject something God has clearly said? Some Christians respond only with anger. Others are so afraid of appearing judgmental that they barely respond. Psalm 119 gives us something deeper. There is a proper moral revulsion toward evil. And there should also be tears. Jesus shows us both. He never treated sin casually. Yet when He approached Jerusalem, knowing its rejection and coming judgment, He wept over the city (Luke 19:41). Truth and tears belong together. Keep them together.

So, think about this: When you see people walking away from God’s truth, does it primarily make you angry at them, or does it break your heart for them?

And here is where the gospel meets us. Before grace found us, you and I were among the faithless. Paul says we were “*disobedient, led astray*” (Titus 3:3). Then, “*...the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, [and] he saved us*” (Titus 3:4–5). Oh, “*What*

*wondrous love is this.*¹ The gospel keeps us from self-righteousness because every Christian is a rescued sinner. Jesus didn't save us because we were the faithful people looking down on everybody else. He died for us because we were the "*everybody else*." He saved us because we needed mercy. He died for our rebellion, rose again, and gave us His Spirit, who now changes our hearts and teaches us faithfulness.

Apply

Think about someone whose rejection of God troubles you. Next, ask God to protect you from two opposite errors. Don't call evil good. And don't stop loving the person doing it. Pray for conviction. Pray for repentance. Pray for salvation. If God gives you an opportunity to speak, speak truth with humility and love. All the while, remember how patiently God has dealt with you.

And remember this. The heart that truly loves God's truth should grieve when people reject it.

Pray

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

Father, teach me to love what You love and hate what You hate without becoming proud, harsh, or self-righteous. Give me a heart that takes sin seriously and still weeps for sinners.

By Your Holy Spirit, keep truth and compassion together in me. Give me wisdom when I need to speak, restraint when I need to remain quiet, and love that continues praying for those who are far from You.

Thank You for Jesus, who saved me when I too was disobedient and wandering. Thank You that He died for my sins and rose again. Let the mercy I have received shape the way I respond to the faithlessness of others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

¹ "*What Wondrous Love Is This*," *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/What_Wondrous_Love_Is_This (Accessed September 22, 2026)

Give Me Life Because You Love Me

Psalm 119:159

“Consider how I love your precepts! Give me life, O LORD, according to your steadfast love.”

Today’s step on our pilgrimage into the blessed life brings us to the third “give me life” prayer in Resh. In v 154 the psalmist prays, “*give me life according to your promise.*” In v. 156 he writes, “*give me life according to your rules.*” Now he says, “*Give me life, O LORD, according to your steadfast love.*” This may be the sweetest one of all.

Think

The verse begins with the Hebrew imperative *re’eh* (ראה), “see” or “consider.” That should sound familiar. *Resh* began in v 153 with “*Look on my affliction.*” Now the psalmist says, “*Consider how I love your precepts!*” Look at my suffering. Look at my love for Your Word. But then notice where his confidence finally rests. “*According to your steadfast love.*”

The Hebrew word is *hesed* (חסד), that wonderful Old Testament word we have encountered repeatedly. It describes God’s steadfast, loyal, covenant love. That means the psalmist’s prayer doesn’t finally rest on the strength of his love for God, i.e., “*Consider how I love your precepts!*” That’s real but it can’t save him. So he prays, “*Give me life...according to your steadfast love.*” God’s love is the foundation of all his redeeming acts and that distinction is enormously important for us.

My love for God changes in intensity. His love for me doesn’t. My devotion can be strong one day and weak another. His *hesed* remains. My faithfulness is imperfect. His is perfect. The psalmist can honestly tell God that he loves His Word while resting his hope in something far more dependable than his own love. He rests in God’s love.

Reflect

We all experience days when we feel spiritually strong. On those days, prayer comes easily, and scripture seems alive. We’re conscious of God’s presence. And there are other days. We’re tired, distracted, discouraged, maybe even disappointed.

Our love for God is real, but our experience of that love can feel terribly inconsistent. How thankful we are that our relationship with God doesn’t rest on the consistency of my emotions.

So, think about this: When you feel spiritually weak, do you spend more time measuring your love for God or resting in His steadfast love for you?

And here is where the gospel meets us. The psalmist can say both: “*I love your precepts*” and speak of “Your steadfast love.” But only one of those loves is perfect. The apostle John reminds us, “*In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son*” (1 John 4:10). And there it is. The foundation of our salvation isn’t our love for God. It is His love for us.

Jesus went to the cross because God loved us. He died for our sins and rose again. And nothing “*in all creation*” can separate those who belong to Christ from “*the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 8:39). We can be overlooked by people, and yet God knows our names (John 10:3). We can be despised by others and still be secure in the love of God in Christ Jesus. And on top of all that, the Spirit pours God’s love into our hearts (Romans 5:5). His love is never in short supply. We just need to remember that.

Apply

Stop measuring God’s love today by your circumstances. And stop measuring it by the strength of your own feelings. Measure it at the cross. Then pray the psalmist’s prayer of “*Give me life, O LORD, according to your steadfast love.*” If you’re tired, ask Him for life. If you’re discouraged, ask Him for life. If your heart feels spiritually dry, ask Him for life. If you’re walking faithfully and simply need strength for another day, ask Him for life.

And remember this. Your love for God may sometimes feel weak, but His steadfast love for you never is.

Pray

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

Father, thank You for Your steadfast love. I do love You and Your Word, but I know my love is imperfect and inconsistent. Thank You that Your love for me never depends on the strength of mine.

By Your Holy Spirit, give me life today. Pour Your love into my heart and deepen my love for Your Word. When I am tired, renew me. When I am discouraged, strengthen me. When I wander, turn me back toward You.

Thank You for Jesus, the greatest demonstration of Your love. Thank You that He died for my sins, rose again, and holds me securely in Your love. Let Your steadfast love become the place where my heart rests as I continue walking the path of the blessed life. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Truth From Beginning to Forever
Psalm 119:160

“The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.”

Today’s final step through *Resh* brings us to something solid. The psalmist has talked about affliction, wickedness, persecution, adversaries, and faithlessness. All of those things can make life feel unstable. Then he ends the stanza saying, *“The sum of your word is truth”* and, *“every one of your righteous rules endures forever.”* Everything around him may be changing. God’s truth isn’t. And that is something to believe in and stand on every day of your life.

Think

The Hebrew phrase translated “The sum of your word” is *rosh devarekha* (רֹאשׁ דְּבָרֶיךָ). *Rosh* ordinarily means “head,” “beginning,” “chief,” or “sum.” Interestingly, *rosh* begins with the Hebrew letter Resh (ר), the letter that begins every verse in this stanza and gives *Resh* its name. Here the ESV translates it “sum,” expressing the idea that taken as a whole, from its beginning and in its totality, God’s Word is truth. It’s not just that some of the Bible is true or the Bible is true some of the time. Oh no. “The sum of your word is truth.”

The Hebrew word for “truth” is *emet* (אֱמֶת). We’ve already encountered it in our journey through Psalm 119. It carries the idea of truth, firmness, reliability, and trustworthiness.

Then the psalmist moves from the whole to every part of Scripture, saying, *“every one of your righteous rules endures forever.”* The sum of Your Word is truth. Every one of Your righteous rules endures. The whole is true. Every part can be trusted. Every jot and every tittle (Matthew 5:18).

And there’s that wonderful word again, “Forever.” Lots of things change every day of our lives. Opinions change. Moral fashions change. Governments change. Our understanding changes. But God’s Word remains. That doesn’t mean you and I always understand every part of Scripture correctly. We don’t. We must remain humble students of the Word. But our imperfect understanding doesn’t make God’s Word imperfect. He has spoken truth and that truth is wholly and always true.

Reflect

You and I live in a world overflowing with words. Think about the news, social media, podcasts, books, talking heads, friends, foes, etc. Everybody has something to say. And much of what sounds absolutely certain today will be forgotten tomorrow. God’s Word is different. It doesn’t have a news cycle. It doesn’t depend on trends. It is true, forever. And that tells you something about how you should value it above other words in your life.

So, think about this: Which voice has the greatest practical authority in your life? When Scripture conflicts with your feelings, preferences, culture, politics, or the opinion of someone you respect, which voice wins?

And here is where the gospel meets us. That's where our belief in biblical truth becomes more than a doctrinal statement. If God's Word is truth, then His Word gets to correct me. Jesus didn't merely teach truth. He said, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life*" (John 14:6). The eternal Word became flesh (John 1:14). He perfectly trusted and obeyed everything the Father had spoken. Then He went to the cross in fulfillment of Scripture, died for our sins, and rose again just as God had promised. God's Word went into the darkness of the tomb and came out proven true. And Jesus prayed for you and me, "*Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth*" (John 17:17). Now His Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of truth," guides Christ's people into truth (John 16:13). God hasn't left us to build our lives on changing opinions. He's given us eternal truth.

Apply

Choose one area of your life where feelings or opinions are particularly strong right now. Then ask a simple question: "*What has God said?*" Not, "*What do I wish He had said?*" Not, "*What does everybody else say?*" But "*What has God said?*" Read carefully. Interpret humbly. Seek wise counsel when necessary. Then build there. The world will continue changing. Your circumstances will continue changing. Even some of your own opinions will change. God's Word will still be true.

And remember this. You can build your changing life on God's unchanging truth.

Pray

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

Father, thank You for giving me truth in a world filled with changing voices. Thank You that the sum of Your Word is truth and that every one of Your righteous rules endures forever.

By Your Holy Spirit, make me a humble and faithful student of Scripture. Correct me when I am wrong. Give me courage when Your truth conflicts with my preferences or the opinions around me. Use Your Word to shape the way I think, love, choose, and live.

Thank You for Jesus, the Word made flesh and the Truth who gives me life. Thank You that He fulfilled Your Word, died for my sins, and rose again just as You promised. Keep me building my life on Him and Your eternal truth as I continue walking the path of the blessed life. In Jesus' name, Amen.