

Give Me Life Again

Psalm 119:153–160

Resh

Intro: There are times when life drains the life out of us.

- You're still getting up in the morning.
- You're still going to work.
- You're still taking care of your family.
- You're still coming to church.
- You still love Jesus.
- You still believe the Bible.
- You haven't abandoned your faith.
- You're just tired....in every way.

- Sometimes it's physical.
- Sometimes it's emotional.
- Sometimes it's spiritual.
- Sometimes it's all three at once.

- Affliction can wear us down.
- Opposition can exhaust us.
- Disappointment can discourage us.

And sometimes one difficulty follows another until we find ourselves saying, *“Lord, I don't know how much more I have in me.”*

Maybe you've been there. I have. And apparently, so has the psalmist.

Today we've reached *Resh*, the twentieth stanza in our journey through Psalm 119. Only two Hebrew letters remain after this one. And by now we know this psalmist pretty well.

- He loves God.
- He loves God's Word.
- He wants to obey God.
- But loving God hasn't insulated him from difficulty.

That's an important lesson for all of us. Being a Christian doesn't shield you from difficulty. Sometimes it increases it.

Listen to what is happening around him in these eight verses.

- He is afflicted in v 153.
- He needs someone to plead his cause in v 154.
- He is surrounded by wickedness in v 155.

- He has “many” persecutors and adversaries in v 157.
- He is watching people become faithless to God in v 158.

Life is pressing in on him from almost every direction. And right in the middle of all that pressure, he keeps praying the same prayer. “*Give me life.*”

- “*Give me life according to your promise*” (v 154).
- “*Give me life according to your rules*” (v 156).
- “*Give me life, O LORD, according to your steadfast love*” (v 159).

Three times in eight verses he prays that prayer. That repetition is telling us something. The psalmist doesn’t simply want God to change what is happening around him. He needs God to do something within him. He needs God to give him life.

And maybe that’s the prayer some of us need to learn this morning.

- Not simply, “*Lord, change this.*”
- Not simply, “*Lord, get me out of this.*”

Sometimes the prayer is simply, “*Lord, give me life again.*”

We’ve learned a lot of things from the psalmist, and one is that exchanging circumstances does just that. It gives you another set of circumstances.

Here’s our **Big Idea**: When life drains us, we can ask God to give us life

- 1 - according to His promise,
- 2 - His Word, and
- 3 - His steadfast love.

So, let’s listen to the psalmist pray.

First: Give Me Life When I Am Afflicted (vs 153–154)

“Look on my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget your law. Plead my cause and redeem me; give me life according to your promise!”

I love how personal the stanza begins - “*Look on my affliction.*”

The Hebrew word “*affliction*” can describe misery, suffering, oppression, or the condition of someone who has been brought low.

We’ve encountered this word family before.

- “*Before I was afflicted I went astray*” (v 67).
- “*It is good for me that I was afflicted*” (v 71).

- *“I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me” (v 75).*

Earlier in the psalm, he could look back and see some of the good God accomplished through his affliction. But that isn't what he is doing here. Here he is hurting. And he wants God to do something about it.

“Look on my affliction and deliver me.”

The Hebrew “look” is *ra'ah*. It means *to see, look at, or perceive*. Now obviously the psalmist knows God can see him. He isn't saying, “God, You must have missed this.” He knows better than that. He is asking for something more than divine observation.

He wants God to see his suffering with compassionate attention and act on his behalf.

It reminds me of *Exodus 3:7-8*, when God says concerning Israel in Egypt, *“I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them...”*

- God saw.
- God knew.
- And God acted.

That's what the psalmist wants.

- *“God, see me.”*
- *“See what is happening to me.”*
- *“See how much this hurts.”*
- *“And please do something.”*

Sometimes that's one of our deepest needs in suffering. We just want someone to see.

You've felt this before –

- People may know what happened without knowing how badly it hurts.
- They may understand the facts without understanding the pain.
- They can see the outside of our circumstances without seeing what is happening inside our hearts.
- And sometimes we don't need somebody to explain everything.
- We don't need advice.
- We don't need somebody to tell us how we ought to feel.
- We simply want someone to see.

God does. You are never invisible to God. He is, according to *Genesis 16:13*, the “*God of seeing...*” or, as it's often rendered, “*The God who sees me.*”

- You may feel overlooked by people. God sees you.
- You may be carrying something nobody else completely understands. God sees you.
- You may not even know how to explain what you're feeling. God sees you.

And notice something else important. He says,

153b - "Look on my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget your law."

Affliction hasn't driven him away from God's Word. In fact, throughout Psalm 119, affliction keeps driving him deeper into it. That's worth noticing because trouble reveals a great deal about where our hearts go for help.

Then in v 154, the picture changes to *"Plead my cause and redeem me."*

Now we've moved into a courtroom. The Hebrew verb translated "*plead*" is a legal term. To plead someone's cause is to take up that person's case and contend on his behalf.

The psalmist is saying, "*God, take my case.*"

Then comes another wonderful word in "*Redeem me.*" The Hebrew verb is *ga'al*.

A *go'el* was a redeemer, someone who acted on behalf of another, often a family member, to rescue, restore, recover, or defend what had been lost.

- Think about Ruth.
- Think about Boaz.

Ruth needed someone who had both the right as a kinsman and the resources to act on her behalf. Boaz became her redeemer.

Now listen again to the psalmist.

- "*Plead my cause.*"
- "*Redeem me.*"
- "*Give me life.*"

He knows he can't do everything for himself. Neither can you. Neither can I.

- There are battles you can't win by yourself.
- There are things you can't fix.
- There are people whose opinions you can't control.
- There are misunderstandings you can't straighten out.
- There are circumstances you can't change.
- There are moments when you simply have to say, "*God, take my case.*"

That doesn't mean we never defend ourselves.

- Sometimes truth requires us to speak.
- If we're wrong, we apologize.
- If reconciliation is possible, we pursue it.
- If an explanation is necessary, we give one.
- If a misunderstanding exists, we correct it.
- But you don't have to win every argument.
- You don't have to fix every relationship.
- You don't have to control what everybody thinks about you.

Sometimes you do what truth and love require, and then you leave room for God to be your defender and say, "*Plead my cause and redeem me.*"

And then comes the first great prayer of *Resh* in the words, "*Give me life according to your promise!*"

Notice that he doesn't say, "*Give me the life I want.*" He says, "*Give me life according to your promise.*" That's different.

Sometimes we imagine that life would be better if God would just arrange everything the way we want it.

- Fix this.
- Remove that.
- Change him.
- Change her.
- Open this door.
- Close that one.
- Give me this.
- Take away that.

But you and I have lived long enough to know that even when one problem is solved, another eventually takes its place.

What we really need is the life that comes from God in whatever circumstance He gives us.

- So the psalmist doesn't say, "*Give me the circumstances I want.*"
- He says, "*Give me life according to your promise.*"

Second: And Here is Where the Gospel Meets Us.

v 154 almost preaches the gospel by itself when it says, "*Plead my cause.*"

The apostle John enters the courtroom when he says, "*we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*" (1 John 2:1).

Paul says, *"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses" (Ephesians 1:7).*

Jesus says, *"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).*

Do you see it?

Our Advocate became our Redeemer so that we could have life.

Our attorney didn't just defend us. He took our place and endured our judgment.

And here's the wonder of the gospel. Jesus didn't plead our innocence. We weren't innocent. We were guilty. So, our Advocate did something no earthly advocate could ever do.

- He took the guilt of His clients upon Himself.
- He went to the cross.
- He bore our sin.
- He paid the price of our redemption.
- He rose from the grave.
- And now He represents us before the Father.

So, when life has drained you, remember who is pleading your cause. Remember who redeemed you. And pray, *"Give me life,"* because He is life (John 14:6).

Third: Give Me Life When I Am Surrounded (vs 155–158)

Now the psalmist looks around. And what he sees isn't encouraging - *"Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek your statutes" (155).*

The Hebrew word translated *"salvation"* is *yeshu'ah*. That's the OT name for Jesus. It can mean salvation, deliverance, rescue, or victory.

But the word that especially catches my attention is *"far."* The Hebrew means, distant, or far away, and that should sound familiar.

Just a few verses ago the psalmist said about his persecutors, *"They are far from your law" (v 150).*

Now in v 155 he says, *"Salvation is far from the wicked."*

Put those two statements together. They are far from God's Word. Salvation is far from them. Why? *"For they do not seek your statutes."*

- The problem isn't that God is unable to save them.
- The problem is the direction of their hearts.

- They aren't seeking Him.

There's a warning here for us. Distance from God usually develops gradually. Most people don't wake up one morning and announce, "*Today I'm going to move as far away from God as I possibly can.*" It happens a little at a time.

- We stop reading
- We stop praying.
- We stop seeking.
- We excuse something Scripture confronts.
- We become comfortable ignoring God in one part of life.
- Then another.

Eventually something that once troubled our conscience doesn't trouble us very much anymore.

IMP: A small turn, continued long enough, can take us a very long way from where we intended to go.

But then look at **v 156** - "*Great is your mercy, O LORD; give me life according to your rules.*"

That is one of the sweetest contrasts in *Resh* - "*Great is your mercy.*"

The word translated "*great*" is *rav*. It can mean great, abundant, numerous, or much. But "*mercy*" is actually **plural**, meaning "*Your mercies*" or "*Your compassions.*"

So we could hear the emotional force of something like this: "*Many are Your compassions, O LORD.*"

And that matters because another "*many*" is coming in the next verse.

"Many are my persecutors and my adversaries" (v 157).

- Many mercies.
- Many persecutors.
- Many adversaries.

Do you see what the psalmist is doing? He can count both. But God comes first. Before he counts his enemies, he counts God's mercies.

Sometimes my problems are easier to count than God's mercies. How about you?

- This person is against me.
- That situation is unresolved.
- This hurts.
- That worries me.
- This didn't turn out the way I hoped.

- That prayer hasn't been answered.

And before long, all the “*many*” things against us fill our field of vision.

But the psalmist teaches us to count differently. Before: “*Many are my persecutors*,” comes: “*Great is your mercy.*”

APP: Your troubles may be many, but God's mercies are more.

That may be a word somebody needs this morning. Your problems may really be many. I'm not asking you to pretend otherwise. The psalmist didn't. But don't count your troubles without counting His mercies. In fact, Paul uses similar language in Ephesians 2.

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (vs 4–5).

- “*Rich in mercy.*” There's our verse.
- “*Made us alive.*” There's our prayer.

God's mercy isn't barely enough. It is rich. It is great. It is abundant.

And so he writes in v 157, “*Many are my persecutors and my adversaries, but I do not swerve from your testimonies.*”

I think the most important word in that verse may be “*but.*”

- Many are against me. ***But.***
- Pressure is everywhere. ***But.***
- I am surrounded. ***But.*** “*I do not swerve from your testimonies.*”

The Hebrew verb translated “*swerve*” can mean to bend, turn aside, incline, or deviate, and you can see it. Pressure is trying to push him off course. It doesn't.

Now that doesn't mean he feels nothing. We've spent twenty stanzas with this man.

- He cries.
- He grieves.
- He fears.
- He hurts.
- He asks for help.

IMP: Faithfulness isn't emotional numbness. But even though the opposition is a lot. His direction remains the same, and there's the issue.

We don't always get to decide how much pressure comes against us. But by God's grace, we can decide what will direct us. Pressure can make us swerve.

- Sometimes because we're afraid.
- Sometimes because we want approval.
- Sometimes because we're tired of conflict.
- Sometimes because we just want life to be easier.

And let me be careful here. Changing direction isn't always wrong. Sometimes it is wise. We should never confuse stubbornness with faithfulness. But there are moments when the issue is clear.

God has spoken, and the question becomes, "*Will pressure move me away from what God has said?*"

Maybe the pressure isn't dramatic. Remember, a small turn, repeated long enough, can take us far from where we intended to go.

Then the psalmist says something in v 158 that may make us uncomfortable when he writes, "*I look at the faithless with disgust, because they do not keep your commands.*"

Those are strong words. The Hebrew word translated "*faithless*" comes from a word meaning to act treacherously, deal faithlessly, or betray. This is more than occasional disobedience. It carries the idea of violated loyalty.

And "*disgust*" is a strong word expressing loathing, revulsion, or deep abhorrence.

We shouldn't weaken Scripture because its language makes us uncomfortable.

But we should ask why the psalmist feels so strongly, and it's 158 - "*Because they do not keep your commands.*"

- He loves God.
- He loves God's Word.
- So, it deeply troubles him when people treat God's Word as though it doesn't matter.

And we've seen this before. Back in v 136 he said, "*My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.*"

That verse helps us interpret this one. His response to sin isn't only disgust. There are tears. That combination matters.

IMP: Truth and tears belong together.

There is a proper moral revulsion toward evil. And we should grieve for people caught in it. Jesus shows us both. He never treated sin casually. But when He approached Jerusalem, knowing its rejection and coming judgment, He wept over the city (Luke 19:41).

So when you see someone rejecting God's truth, ask yourself,

- *"Does it only make me angry?*
Or
- *"Does it also break my heart?"*

Before grace found us, you and I were among the faithless.

Paul says we were *"disobedient, led astray" (Titus 3:3).*

And then comes one of my favorite adversative conjunctions in the Bible.

"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us" (Titus 3:4-5).

We aren't faithful people looking down on all those faithless people. We are rescued sinners.

That changes the way we respond to the faithlessness around us.

- Don't call evil good.
- And don't stop loving the person doing it.
- Truth and tears.

And through all of this pressure, what does the psalmist pray? *"Give me life" (159b).*

Which brings us to the third prayer -

Fourth: Give Me Life Because You Love Me (vs 159-160)

It reads, *"Consider how I love your precepts! Give me life, O LORD, according to your steadfast love" (159)*

This may be the sweetest of the three. And there is something here I don't want you to miss. The verse begins with the Hebrew imperative *re'eh*, which means, "See" or "Consider."

That sounds familiar, doesn't it? It should.

Resh began, *"Look on my affliction" (v 153).*

Now the psalmist says, *"Consider how I love your precepts!" (v 159).*

- Look at my suffering.
- Look at my love for Your Word.

But then notice that his confidence finally rests in the words, *"Give me life, O LORD, according to your steadfast love."*

There's *hesed* again. God's steadfast, loyal, covenant love.

And there is a subtle but enormously important distinction here. The psalmist can say, "*Look at how I love Your precepts.*" His love is real.

But he doesn't say, "*Give me life according to my love for You.*" He says, "*Give me life according to Your steadfast love.*"

- His love for God is real.
- God's love for him is the foundation.
- The psalmist doesn't ultimately ground his plea in **his love for God**.
- He grounds it in **God's steadfast love for him**.

That distinction makes all the difference.

- 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.

So, 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. And that's so important to remember.

Some days you feel spiritually strong.

- Prayer comes easily.
- Scripture seems alive.
- You're conscious of God's presence.

And then there are other days when

- You're tired.
- Distracted.
- Discouraged.
- Maybe even disappointed.

Your love for God is real, but your experience of that love can feel terribly inconsistent.

I'm glad our relationship with God doesn't rest on the consistency of our commitment to Jesus.

John says, *"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son" (1 John 4:10).*

IMP: There it is. The foundation of our salvation isn't our love for God. It is His love for us.

- So, stop measuring God's love by your circumstances.
- Stop measuring God's love by your performance.
- Stop measuring God's love by others' love for you.
- And stop measuring it by the strength of your feelings.
- Measure it at the cross.

The cross is why Paul says *nothing "in all creation" can separate those who belong to Christ from "the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39).*

- You can be overlooked by people, and God still knows your name.
- You can be despised by others and still be secure in the love of God in Christ Jesus.
- You can be tired.
- You can be discouraged.
- You can be spiritually dry.
- You can be walking faithfully and simply need enough strength for one more day.
- And you can pray, *"Give me life, O LORD, according to your steadfast love."*

Why? How? Because your love for God may sometimes feel weak, but His steadfast love for you never is.

Then *Resh* ends with something solid beneath our feet in these words, *"The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever" (160).*

What an ending. Think about everything that has been unstable in these eight verses.

- Affliction.
- Wickedness.
- Persecution.
- Adversaries.
- Faithlessness.

Everything around the psalmist seems to be moving so he ends this stanza with something that doesn't - *"The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever" (160).*

The ESV translates the *rosh devarekha* as it "sum," expressing the idea that God's Word, taken as a whole, is truth

- Not some of it.
- Not merely the parts I like.

- Not merely the parts my world presently agrees with.
- Not merely the parts I completely understand.

“The sum of your word is truth.”

Then he moves from the whole to every part - *“Every one of your righteous rules endures forever.”*

That’s a wonderful movement.

- The whole is true.
- Every part can be trusted.

And there’s that wonderful word again. *“Forever.”*

- People change.
- Opinions change.
- Moral fashions change.
- Governments change.
- Our understanding changes.
- God’s Word remains.

Now, you and I live in a world overflowing with words.

- News.
- Social media.
- Podcasts.
- Books.
- Experts.
- Commentators.
- Friends.
- Everybody has something to say.
- And much of what sounds absolutely certain today will be forgotten tomorrow.
- But God’s Word is different.

APP: So, here’s the question: Which voice has the greatest practical authority in your life?

- When Scripture conflicts with your feelings, which voice wins?
- When Scripture conflicts with your preferences, which voice wins?
- When Scripture conflicts with the culture/friends, which voice wins?
- When Scripture conflicts with the opinion of somebody you deeply respect, which voice wins?

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.

And ultimately, our confidence in God's Word brings us again to Jesus. Jesus didn't merely teach truth. He said, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life"* (John 14:6).

There's our word again. Life. The eternal Word became flesh. And then, God's Word went into the depth of the tomb and came out proven true.

And now Jesus prays for His you, *"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth"* (John 17:17).

God hasn't left you to build your changing life on changing opinions. He has given you truth.

So when life drains you, what do you do? Ask God for life.

- When you're afflicted, *"Give me life."*
- When you're surrounded, *"Give me life."*
- When you're weary, *"Give me life."*
- When you're discouraged, *"Give me life."*
- When your heart feels spiritually dry, *"Give me life."*
- When you have many problems and many adversaries, remember His many mercies and pray, *"Give me life."*
- When you aren't sure how strong your love for God feels today, rest in His steadfast love and pray, *"Give me life."*

And when everything around you seems to be changing, put your feet down on something that never will: *"The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever."*

Conclusion: Some of us may have come here this morning with very little left in the tank.

You love God. You love His Word. You haven't abandoned His testimonies. You're just tired. Then maybe the most spiritual prayer you can pray this morning isn't complicated at all. You don't need impressive words. You don't need a long prayer. You can borrow three words from the psalmist: *"Give me life."*

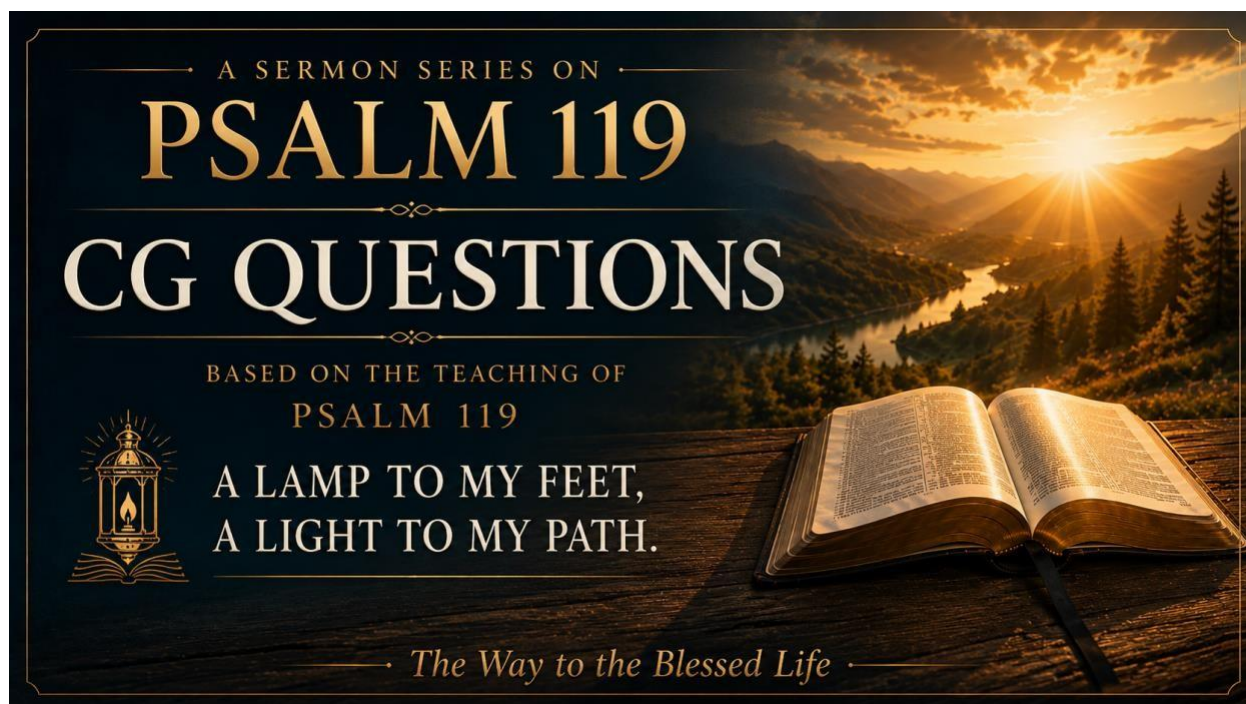
- Give me life according to Your promise.
- Give me life according to Your Word.
- Give me life according to Your steadfast love.

And the God you are praying to is the God who sees your affliction.

- He is the God who pleads your cause.
- He is the God who redeemed you.
- He is rich in mercy.
- He loves you with steadfast love.
- His Word is truth.

- And in Jesus, He is the God who gives you abundant and eternal life.

So when life drains you, go to the One who has life to give and cry, *"Give me life, O LORD, according to your steadfast love."*



Observation

What does the text say?

1. Read Psalm 119:153–160. What difficulties does the psalmist identify in these eight verses? Which words or phrases tell you what he’s experiencing?
2. The prayer “give me life” appears three times in the stanza (vs 154, 156, 159). What does the psalmist connect with that prayer each time?
3. Compare vs 153 and 159. What does the psalmist ask God to “look on” or “consider” in each verse?
4. What contrast do you see between God’s “great” mercy in v 156 and the “many” persecutors and adversaries in v 157? Why might the order of those statements matter?
5. According to v 160, what two things does the psalmist say about God’s Word at the end of the stanza?

Interpretation

What does the text mean?

6. In v 153, the psalmist asks God to “look on my affliction.” Since he already knows God sees everything, what is he really asking God to do? How does Exodus 3:7 help us understand his prayer?
7. In v 154, what do the expressions “plead my cause” and “redeem me” tell us about what the psalmist believes about himself and about God?
8. The sermon says, “Faithfulness isn’t emotional numbness.” How does v 157, together with the rest of Psalm 119, help us understand the difference between faithfulness and simply pretending that opposition doesn’t hurt?

9. Read vs 136 and 158 together. How do “disgust” and “streams of tears” help us understand a biblical response to sin and faithlessness? What does it mean to keep “truth and tears” together?
10. In v 159, why is it significant that the psalmist asks for life according to God’s “steadfast love” rather than according to his own love for God? What does this teach us about the foundation of our relationship with God?

Correlation

What other texts support my interpretation?

11. Read 1 John 2:1, Ephesians 1:7, and John 10:10. How does Jesus fulfill the three requests of v 154: “Plead my cause,” “redeem me,” and “give me life”?
12. Compare Psalm 119:156 with Ephesians 2:4–5. What connection do you see between God being “rich in mercy” and His making us “alive together with Christ”?
13. Read Titus 3:3–5. How does Paul’s description of what we once were affect the way Christians should respond to people who are presently rejecting God’s truth? What difference does the “but” of vs 4–5 make?
14. Compare Psalm 119:159 with 1 John 4:10 and Romans 8:38–39. Where should Christians look for assurance of God’s love when their own feelings or devotion seem weak?
15. Read Psalm 119:160 alongside John 14:6 and John 17:17. What connections do you see among God’s Word as truth, Jesus as “the truth,” and our sanctification through the truth?

Application

How does God use this to conform me to Jesus?

16. Is there something in your life right now that has been “draining the life out of you”? What would it mean for you to pray, “Give me life,” rather than only asking God to change your circumstances?
17. The sermon says, “Your troubles may be many, but God’s mercies are more.” What troubles are easiest for you to count right now? What specific mercies of God can you count alongside them?
18. Is there any pressure right now that is tempting you to “swerve” from something God has clearly said? How can you distinguish genuine faithfulness from mere stubbornness?
19. Which do you tend to measure most when you’re discouraged: your love for God or God’s steadfast love for you? How would “measuring His love at the cross” change the way you face a spiritually dry or difficult season?
20. The sermon asks, “Which voice has the greatest practical authority in your life?” Where are your feelings, preferences, culture, or the opinion of someone you respect presently competing with Scripture? What would it look like this week to build your changing life on God’s unchanging truth?