

Great Peace for Lovers
Psalm 119:161–168

Introduction: We're nearing the end of our journey through Psalm 119. After *Sin* and *Shin*, only one stanza remains. We've walked with the psalmist through affliction, temptation, disappointment, opposition, waiting, and joy. Again and again, he has brought us back to the same place: the blessed life is a Word-centered life.

But this stanza begins in a place that doesn't sound very blessed. "*Princes persecute me without cause*" (v 161).

These aren't insignificant people. They are people with position, authority, and power. And the psalmist says their opposition is unjust. He hasn't brought this trouble upon himself. They are persecuting him "*without cause*."

But here is what we should notice. After that first line, he never mentions the princes again. They haven't necessarily gone anywhere. The problem hasn't been resolved. The people opposing him haven't apologized. Yet the psalmist turns his attention away from them and toward God.

And one word begins to dominate the stanza. It is the word "*love*."

- "*I love your law*" (v 163).
- "*Great peace have those who love your law*" (v 165).
- "*I love them exceedingly*" (v 167).

The princes may have his attention for a moment, but God's Word has his heart.

And right in the middle of this stanza comes one of the great statements of Psalm 119 which reads, "*Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble*" (v 165).

Think about that. He is being persecuted, and he has great peace. Powerful people are against him, and he has great peace. His circumstances are unsettled, and he has great peace. The princes are still there. So is the peace. That tells us immediately that biblical peace must be something more than peaceful circumstances.

Big Idea: Those who love God's Word can live with great peace because His truth gives them joy, stability, hope, and a life of faithful obedience.

So, what does a life that loves God's Word look like?

First: Let's Stand in Awe of God's Word (vs 161–164)

Look again at v 161 - "*Princes persecute me without cause, but my heart stands in awe of your words*."

There are two authorities in that verse.

- There are princes who possess earthly authority, and
- there is God who possesses ultimate authority.

These earthly people really can make the psalmist's life difficult. He doesn't pretend otherwise. But then comes that little word "*but*."

"Princes persecute me without cause, but my heart stands in awe of your words."

The expression translated "*stands in awe*" carries the idea of fear, dread, even trembling. And notice he doesn't say, "My heart trembles before the princes." His heart trembles before God's Word.

Men may possess enough power to threaten him, but God alone possesses the authority to rule his heart.

APP: That raises a question for you and me. Whose words have the greatest power over your heart? Most of us will never stand before a hostile prince. But we know what it is like to give another person's words enormous power over us.

- Someone criticizes us.
- Someone misunderstands us.
- Someone lies about us.
- Someone embarrasses us.
- Someone whose approval matters to us is disappointed in us.

And we replay the conversation. We wonder what they think. We imagine what they may say next. Before long, their words have become louder in our hearts than God's words.

The psalmist shows us another way to live. He doesn't pretend the princes are powerless. He simply refuses to give them the place that belongs to God.

And then something happens. Awe becomes joy in "*I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil*" (v 162).

What a picture. Imagine unexpectedly discovering a treasure. The word "*spoil*" normally referred to the valuable possessions taken after victory in battle. Silver. Gold. Clothing. Livestock. Treasure.

And the psalmist says, "*That's what opening God's Word is like for me.*" He doesn't merely endure Scripture. He delights in it.

We sometimes approach Bible reading almost entirely as a responsibility. Christians should read their Bibles, and of course we should. But the psalmist reminds us that opening the Bible isn't merely fulfilling an obligation. It is searching for treasure. And what treasure we have!

In Scripture –

- we discover who God is.
- We discover why He made us.
- We discover what has gone wrong with us and our world.
- We discover what God has done to rescue sinners and make all things right.
- We learn how to live and where history is going.

And ultimately, Scripture leads us to Jesus. That is greatest Spoil.

Then v 163 reads, “*I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love your law.*” Again, notice the “but.” He hates falsehood because he loves truth. The defining affection of this verse isn’t hatred. It is love.

If you love justice, injustice troubles you. If you love kindness, cruelty grieves you. If you love faithfulness, betrayal becomes painful. And when you love the God of truth, falsehood becomes increasingly offensive to you.

That begins with our own lives. It is easy to read this verse and think about everybody else’s dishonesty. But what about mine?

- Do I exaggerate because it makes the story better?
- Do I leave out something important because the whole truth might make me look worse?
- Do I repeat something about somebody before I know whether it is true?
- Do I want truth only when truth agrees with me?

Loving God’s Word should make us truthful people.

And then v 164 - “*Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules.*”

I don’t think the psalmist is giving us a command to set seven alarms on our phones every day. Seven often communicates fullness or completeness. His point is that praise has become part of the rhythm of his life.

And remember, the princes are still there. He doesn’t praise God seven times because seven wonderful things happened that day. He praises God because God remains righteous regardless of what happens that day.

IMP: * Sometimes we praise God because something wonderful has happened.

- Other times we praise Him because He is wonderful even when what is happening isn’t.

Do you see the progression?

- Awe leads to joy.
- Joy deepens love.

- Love produces praise.

What we truly treasure eventually shapes the way we live. And all of that brings us to the center of this stanza.

Second: Let's Rest in the Peace of God's Word (v 165)

“Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble.”

The Hebrew expression is *shalom rav*.

- Shalom can mean peace, well-being, wholeness, completeness.
- Rav means great or abundant.

This isn't a little peace barely sufficient to get us through the day. It's great peace. It's abundant peace. And who has it? *“Those who love your law.”*

Why? Well, the psalmist has been telling us that throughout Psalm 119. For instance, in last week's stanza the psalmist said, *“The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever”* (v. 160).

Why? Because God's Word gives us something stable and trustworthy when everything around us seems unstable and unreliable.

- Circumstances change.
- People disappoint us.
- Plans fail.
- Bodies grow weaker.
- People we love die.

But God's Word tells us who God is, what He has done, what He has promised, and where our lives are ultimately going.

APP: And here is something we need to understand. Great peace does not mean a trouble-free life. Verse 161 and v 165 are in the same stanza.

- *“Princes persecute me without cause.”*
- *“Great peace have those who love your law.”*

Both are true at the same time.

We often think peace is waiting for us on the other side of whatever is troubling us.

- I'll have peace when the doctor gives me good news.
- I'll have peace when this conflict is resolved.
- I'll have peace when that person leaves me alone.

- I'll have peace when I know what is going to happen.

But if our peace depends upon our circumstances, our peace will always be as unstable as our circumstances. Something will eventually change. The psalmist has discovered something better. The princes are still there. So is the peace.

Third: And this is where the Gospel meets us

Jesus promises exactly that kind of peace, saying, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you*" (John 14:27).

Think about when Jesus said that; at the Last Supper.

- Within hours He would be arrested.
- The disciples would scatter.
- Their world would appear to collapse.

Jesus promised peace before the circumstances became peaceful.

And that brings us to the gospel.

- Our deepest problem has never been our circumstances.
- Our deepest problem is our sin and alienation from God.
- So Jesus went to the cross. He bore our sin. He died in our place. He rose from the dead.

And Paul says, "*Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Rom 5:1).

Before we experience the peace of God, Jesus gives us peace with God. That order matters. If you belong to Jesus, the deepest issue of your existence has already been settled. God is no longer your Judge against you. In Christ, He is your Father.

- Your sins are forgiven.
- Christ is risen.
- You belong to Him.
- Nothing can separate you from His love.

The world can disturb many things around you. It cannot undo what Jesus has accomplished for you. And so, "*nothing can make them stumble.*"

IMP: That doesn't mean Christians never suffer. It doesn't mean we never struggle. It certainly doesn't mean we never sin. The psalmist has experienced all of those things. The idea is stability.

God's Word doesn't remove the rocks from the road. That's unreasonable to think. It gives us something solid beneath our feet as we walk over them. That is great peace.

Fourth: Let's Live in Hopeful Obedience to God's Word (vs 166–168)

Now notice how the psalmist concludes the stanza, saying, “*I hope for your salvation, O LORD, and I do your commandments*” (v 166).

There are two things happening simultaneously.

- He hopes.
- And he obeys.

Really, what else can you do? Pine away? Feel sorry for yourself? Complain? Blame other people? None of those are healthy responses to life's troubles or sorrows. The psalmist provides us with another way to look and live.

He is waiting for God to do what only God can do, *while* continuing to do what God has told him to do.

That is a wonderful picture of biblical hope. Sometimes waiting is one of the hardest places to obey.

- We wait for medical results.
- We wait for somebody else to make a decision.
- We wait for a relationship to change.
- We wait for God to answer a prayer.

And waiting makes us feel powerless because we can't control the outcome. But there is almost always something we can do while we wait. We can continue doing what God has already told us to do.

IMP: * Hope looks toward what God will do.

- Obedience attends to what God has told us to do today.

Then v 167 says, “*My soul keeps your testimonies; I love them exceedingly.*”

See? He's doing what he knows to do and hoping God will do what only God can do. And that gives him peace in the midst of princes.

And....there is that word again. *Love*.

That's a brilliant word there. It calls into question what we love.

- Our comfort
- Our way
- Our definition of success
- Our reputation
- Our plans

- Our opinions
- Our politics
- Our traditions

He doesn't say, "*I keep your testimonies because I have to.*" He says, "*I love them exceedingly.*"

Through 167 verses, the psalmist has learned that God really does love him and that God's Word is true. Now, 167 verses later, he's going to trust that love and truth and rest in it. And that, friends, gives him peace.

- This is more than reluctant compliance.
- Love and trust, love and obedience, love and faith, love and hope have come together.

Jesus said something remarkably similar when he said, "*I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father*" (John 14:31).

Isn't that interesting? Jesus joined love, faith, hope and obedience perfectly.

- He obeyed because He loved and believed His Father.
- And that obedience took Him all the way to the cross.

GOSPEL: Jesus obeyed where you and I have disobeyed. He died for our disobedience and rose again. And now the Holy Spirit works within us so that obedience increasingly grows from the inside out.

And then comes v 168 - "*I keep your precepts and testimonies, for all my ways are before you.*"

What a way to end the stanza.

- It began with powerful people watching the psalmist.
- It ends with God watching him in "*all my ways are before you.*"

Every road he walks is before God. Every easy road, every difficult road, every lit road, every dark road, every happy road, every painful road. The blessed life is the life aware of God.

Christians have sometimes used the Latin expression *coram Deo*, which means, *Before the face of God*.

To live *coram Deo* means living every part of life consciously in God's presence and under His authority.

"All my ways are before you."

- God sees me on Sunday morning.
- God sees me on Monday afternoon.
- God sees me when other Christians are around.

- God sees me when no one else is around.
- He hears the words I speak before I speak them.
- He knows my motives before I act.
- He knows my fears before I feel them.
- He sees my secret sins before I commit them.
- He sees my hurt before it hurts me.
- And He sees those quiet acts of faithfulness nobody else will ever applaud.

There is no private version of you that is private from God.

Now, that truth should produce integrity. But don't miss something else. For this psalmist, it is also comforting.

Remember where he began - “*Princes persecute me without cause.*”

- People may misunderstand you.
- They may misrepresent you.
- They may question your motives.
- You may never succeed in making everybody understand the whole story.
- But God does.
- The God who sees everyone and everything sees accurately.

Conclusion: So look at where this stanza has taken us.

- The psalmist begins surrounded by opposition.
- And he ends before the face of God.

Along the way he stands in awe of God's Word.

- He rejoices in it like treasure.
- He loves truth.
- He praises God.
- He possesses great peace.
- He hopes for salvation.
- He obeys.
- And beneath all of it is his love for God and the Bible

He loves God's Word because through God's Word he has come to know and love the God who speaks.

Can I go back to Jesus?

Fifth: This is where the gospel meets us again

Jesus perfectly lived the life Psalm 119 describes.

- Powerful rulers opposed Him without cause.
- False witnesses lied about Him.
- Yet He remained faithful.
- He loved righteousness.
- He hated wickedness.
- He lived every moment before the face of His Father.
- He obeyed His Father all the way to the cross.

And there He died for all the times we haven't.

- He died for our fear of people.
- Our falsehood.
- Our lack of praise.
- Our anxious hearts.
- Our disobedience.
- Our hidden sins.

Then He rose again.

- So Jesus is both our model and our means.
- He shows us the blessed life, and by His Spirit He enables us increasingly to live it.

Maybe that is ultimately why “*great peace*” – *shalom rav* - means so much.

- The world can threaten many things we possess.
- Circumstances can change.
- People can disappoint us.
- Bodies can fail us.
- Princes can persecute us.

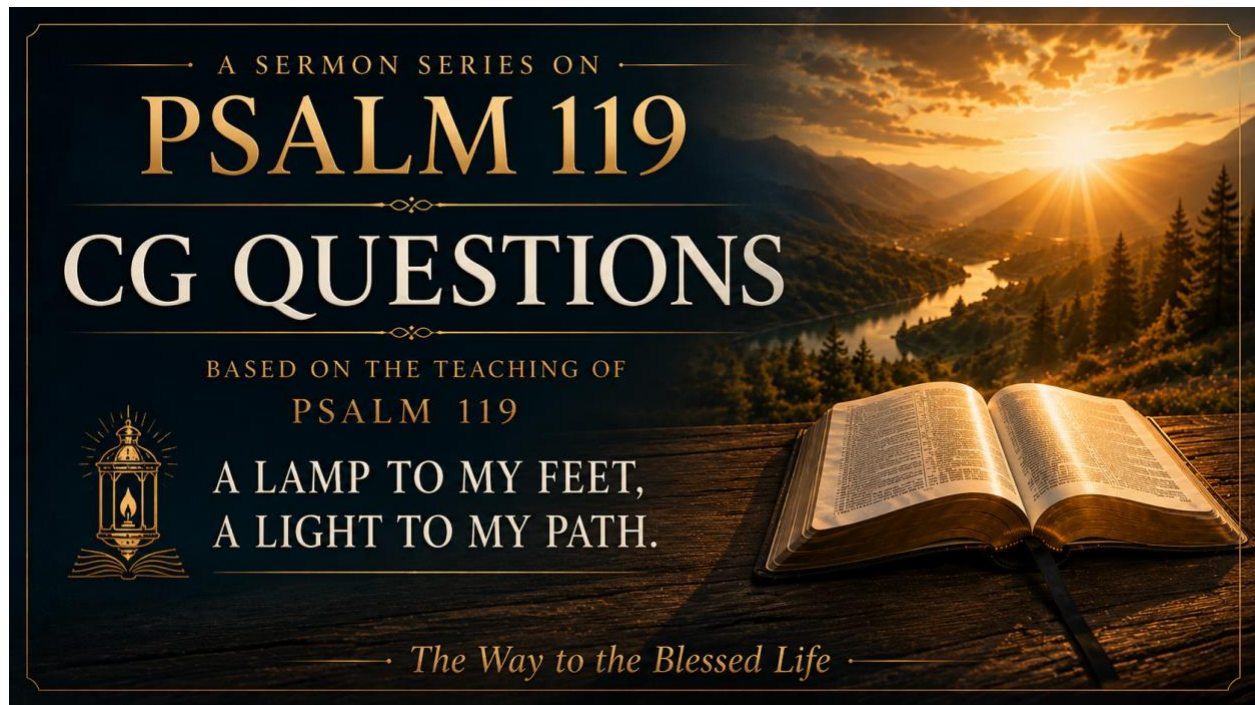
But if we belong to Christ, the deepest issue of our existence has already been settled. We have peace with God. And because we have peace with God, we can experience the peace of God.

- The princes may still be there.
- So is the peace.

“Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble.”

P.S. Why is this stanza called Sin/Shin? The Hebrew letter ש can be pronounced two ways. With the dot on the right (שׁ), it is *Shin* and sounds like “sh.” With the dot on the left (שׂ), it is *Sin* and

sounds like “s.” Since both forms represent the same basic Hebrew letter, the twenty-first stanza of Psalm 119 is often called **Sin/Shin**.



Observation

What does the text say?

1. What problem does the psalmist face in v 161, and how does he respond to it?
2. What words in vs 161–164 describe the psalmist’s different responses to God’s Word?
3. What does the psalmist say about falsehood and God’s law in v 163?
4. According to v 165, who has “great peace,” and what does the psalmist say cannot make them stumble?
5. In vs 166–168, what connections do you see between hope, love, and obedience?

Interpretation

What does the text mean?

6. Why is the contrast in v 161 significant: “Princes persecute me without cause, but my heart stands in awe of your words”? What does it reveal about which authority matters most to the psalmist?
7. In v 162, why do you think the psalmist compares finding truth in God’s Word to finding “great spoil”? What does that picture tell us about the value he places on Scripture?
8. Verse 163 says, “I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love your law.” How does loving God’s truth affect the way we view what is false?
9. The Hebrew words translated “great peace” in v 165 are shalom rav, carrying the idea of abundant peace or peace in great measure. Why is that remarkable considering the persecution of v 161? 21 - Sin and Shin
10. Verse 168 says, “all my ways are before you.” What does this tell us about how the psalmist understands his entire life in relation to God?

Correlation

Where else in the Bible can I find this concept?

11. Read Matthew 10:28. How does Jesus' teaching help us understand the psalmist's greater awe of God than of powerful people in v 161?
12. Read John 14:27. How is the peace Jesus promises His disciples similar to the "great peace" of Psalm 119:165?
13. Read Philippians 4:6–7. What does this passage teach us about experiencing God's peace while our circumstances remain difficult?
14. Read Romans 5:1. What is the relationship between having "peace with God" through Jesus and experiencing the peace of God in our daily lives?
15. Read John 14:31. How does Jesus perfectly demonstrate the connection between love and obedience that we see in vs 166–168?

Application

How Can God conform me to Christ with this?

16. The psalmist feared God's Word more than the words of powerful people. Whose approval, criticism, or opinion is most likely to become too important to you?
17. Verse 163 forces us to ask what we really love. Is there something you love, such as comfort, your own way, success, reputation, security, control, or approval, that sometimes competes with your love for God's truth?
18. What circumstance are you presently tempted to believe must change before you can have peace? How does v 165 challenge that assumption?
19. Verse 166 shows the psalmist hoping for God's salvation while continuing to obey. What are you waiting for God to do, and what has He already told you to do while you wait?
20. If you really believed every moment this week that "all my ways are before you" (v 168), what is one specific area of your life that would change?