

## Dependence, Delight, and Duty

[Psalm 119:33-56](#)

Walking in the Word - [Psalm 119](#)

One of the books that my children and grandchildren alike have loved is the book “the **Monster at the end of this book**” I can’t tell you how many times I have read this dramatically. I get into it, because that’s what I can do. I’m not super creative and I’m not great at pretend games, but expressiveness in reading, I can do.

But I **never pick up that book to read for just me**. I never picked up that book on my own and said what I really need right now is some more Grover. I only love it because they love it. I don’t love it for me. I need more sophisticated and more intelligent thinking.

Long time Christ follower, is there **any part of God’s word to us that you feel this way about?** Maybe the birth narratives of Jesus in [Luke 2](#). The feeding of the 5000? [Psalm 23](#)? We face two dangers; one is to always jump to your favorite passages and always want to read or study or hear sermons from those. The other is for someone like me to keep wanting to move to the more exotic, controversial or lessor known passages and wow people with my ability to sort out the hard stuff.

**danger of thinking that we have intellectually exhausted all the fruit from a well-known passage**

[Psalm 119](#) attacks well the **danger of thinking that we have exhausted all the fruit from a well-known passage** and that there is nothing left to see. A healthier approach is to pray, “Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end,” as the first verse of our text says.

- › We require a tension between relying on God and obeying God with diligence all fed by a delight in who God is and what he has said. The Christian life makes no sense without this tension.

**Are you wrestling with a healthy tension amongst dependence, duty, and delight?**

I’ve organized the text into three, three word prayers. Give me life, make me bold, toughen me up.

# Give me life!

[Psalm 119:33-40](#) (ESV) **Teach me**, O Lord, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end. 34 **Give me** understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. 35 **Lead me** in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. 36 **Incline my heart** to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! 37 **Turn my eyes** from looking at worthless things; and **give me life** in your ways. 38 **Confirm to your servant your promise**, that you may be feared. 39 **Turn away the reproach** that I dread, for your rules are good. 40 Behold, I long for your precepts; in your righteousness **give me life!**

**33-34 Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.**

The need to pray like this never goes away. If God doesn't teach us and give us understanding, we will not be able to persevere in obedience. He asks for **more than for God to teach him the details**. He asks God to teach him **the way** of his statutes. The way of them means **both knowing them and knowing how and where and when they apply to the circumstances in life**.

This prayer shows trust and humility. The Spirit prompts you and me to cultivate this approach to scripture, otherwise, we will think that we will have seen all that there is to see in familiar passages.

**35 Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. 36 Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!**

The first two verses were about growing in understanding. This verse then speaks about God's leadership and guidance. That's closely related to the previous ideas but carries a different nuance, The phrase **"I delight in it" magnifies the word "path"** not the word **"commandments"**. He delights in the trajectory they are guiding him in.

But His delight is not complete. His heart requires further shaping toward God's testimonies. His heart requires ongoing drawing and wooing, so he prays that God would incline him to love his testimonies. He prays for fresh delight in God's word to him and not to selfish gain, which comes naturally.

**37 Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways. Confirm to your servant your promise, that you may be feared. Turn**

**away the reproach that I dread, for your rules are good. Behold, I long for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life!**

**He confesses he's tempted to look for life in the wrong places. But now he prays for God to give him life in his ways.**

Life is what we desire, what we crave. Everything hinges on to whom or to what we cry this to. If we say “Give me life!” to our physical beauty, that life will be short lived. If we say “give me life! To our athletic dreams, they will not last. If we seek life from sexual pleasure, regardless of God’s good instruction for how, we will shipwreck our lives. If we say, give me life to financial security, we will never have enough. If we say give me life to our family we will crush them with our expectations. The only direction this has ever and will ever work is when we ultimately and only cry “give me life” to God himself.

**Jesus said that his yoke is easy because he offers us a love-based relationship where the believer grows to want to do what God commands.**

The Spirit draws us into such a relationship if we cooperate with him. He will shape our desires to match up with his desires. He will shape us to want to please God. But the request remains, we need God to give us understanding so that we can do that. Part of that understanding will be that we increasingly trust that we would want exactly what God wants if we knew all that God knows about us, about the world, and about our future.

God loves beauty, he invented pleasure, he designed adventure, he created the glories of the universe, he means for us to delight in all these treasures that he designed for his glory and our good but we are always meant to find in every delight to recognize that every good gift is from the Father above and as C.S. Lewis said we are to follow the sun beams back to the sun, we always turn to ultimately delight in the source of all that good rather than in the goods themselves.

**no matter how intellectually brilliant no one will ever outgrow the need to pray 119:30 [John 3:16](#) to hardest.**

No Christian, no matter how mature, no matter how well versed in the scripture and **no matter how intellectually bright, will ever outgrow the need to pray this prayer about any and all of God’s word from [John 3:16](#)** to trying to grasp some of the most controversial hot button passages in all the scriptures. Because even though you **may have memorized** a well known verse, you have **never looked at that verse from the place where you now** sit at

your current age, having experienced all that you have experienced, thought all that you have thought and grieved all that you have grieved. And the Holy Spirit works as we cooperate with him to synthesize new learning in our souls from the new experiences we have had, the people we have met, and the new learning that we have done and so we come to see God's truth from a fresh vista which we have never seen before.

## How can we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in praying "Give me life!"

- Pray for God to teach you every time you pick up the word

A willingness to obey should also be considered necessary to the right understanding of Scripture: Grudem

- Ask God to keep shaping your heart to love his testimonies  
Confess when you find yourself seeking life somewhere else

## Are you wrestling with a healthy tension amongst dependence, duty, and delight?

## Make me bold

[Psalm 119:41-48](#) (ESV) **Let your steadfast love come to me, O LORD, your salvation according to your promise; 42 then shall I have an answer for him who taunts me, for I trust in your word. 43 And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for my hope is in your rules. 44 I will keep your law continually, forever and ever, 45 and I shall walk in a wide place, for I have sought your precepts. 46 I will also speak of your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame, 47 for I find my delight in your commandments, which I love. 48 I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes.**

**v. 41-43 he prays. v. 44-47 he commits.**

**41 Let your steadfast love come to me, O Lord, your salvation according to your promise; 42 then shall I have an answer for him who taunts me, for I trust in your word. 43 And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for my hope is in your rules. dependence**

Taunting is real. It's not new, it happened then, it happens now, it will happen in the future. We should not expect that we'll be free from this experience or that we can be winsome enough to avoid ridicule.

- › Regarding take not the word of truth from my mouth. Their culture relied on verbal rehearsal to learn and remember. But we need this more than we think because we don't keep God's truth in our minds or hearts to the extent they did. We have it in our pockets or on the shelf, but it doesn't have the same benefit to us because we're not dwelling on it in real time.

The ubiquity of **smart phones** and Bible apps have **discouraged this heart storage**. These **devices seduce me**. I love technology and I have off and on believed that I am one step away from having just the right app to make me wildly effectively in every arena of my life.

There's a qualitative difference in having instant access to any scripture in multiple translations on an app and storing God's word in my heart. instant access does not provide the same affect.

**44I will keep your law continually, forever and ever, 45 and I shall walk in a wide place, for I have sought your precepts. 46 I will also speak of your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame, 47for I find my delight in your commandments, which I love. 48I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes.**

He does not show overconfidence. He knows his need too well for that to be true. See 119:5

Jesus talked about a narrow way, but that's a different word picture with a different point. That metaphor speaks to the path to following God being hard to get onto and that few find it. But "I shall walk in a wide place" speaks about a person who is already on the narrow path. Once there, seeking out God's precepts teaches him to be on the alert for temptations and disruptions to his faithful following of God so that he is less likely to be tripped up or distracted because of his faithful seeking out of God's precepts.

Verse 46 speaks to having the courage to defy the intimidation of an inner ring as C.S. Lewis described it: the slide to become a bad person happens at a moment of temptation to compromise that means the difference between being accepted by a group from which you desperately want acceptance, or standing firm to your convictions and choosing to do that is right. Delighting in God's precepts enables us to speak God's testimonies before those with the power to banish us from friendship or employment or accomplishment in education or sports. And so The Psalmist exclaims "I shall not be put to shame."

"The draw of the Inner Ring has such profound corrupting power because it never announces itself as evil—indeed, it never announces itself at all. On these grounds Lewis

makes a “prophecy” to his audience at King’s College: “To nine out of ten of you the choice which could lead to scoundrelism will come, when it does come, in no very dramatic colours.... Over a drink or a cup of coffee, disguised as a triviality and sandwiched between two jokes... the hint will come.” And when it does come, “you will be drawn in, if you are drawn in, not by desire for gain or ease, but simply because at that moment, when the cup was so near your lips, you cannot bear to be thrust back again into the cold outer world.”\* 3 It is by these subtle means that people who are “not yet very bad” can be drawn to “do very bad things”—by which actions they become, in the end, very bad people.” How to Think: A Survival Guide for a World at Odds by Alan Jacobs

Meditation on God’s word will grant us the increasing conviction to speak God’s testimonies in any and every environment and not be put to shame. Jesus said,

[Mark 8:38](#) (ESV) For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

The path to greater boldness in both living according to conviction in spite of crosswinds to the contrary and the the courage and faith to speak the truth of scripture comes from our meditation on scripture so that we so love what God says that we can’t help but want to share it. **We may need this study in [Psalm 119](#) more than just about anything else that we could study.**

**Cooperate with the Spirit to make me bold by**

- **Meditate on God’s steadfast love**
- **Speak God’s testimonies before the powerful**
- **Face ridicule by trusting God’s word without shame**

**Are you wrestling with a healthy tension amongst dependence, duty, and delight? We are helped in this by praying give me life and make me bold and finally**

## Toughen me up

**Give me a soft heart and a thick skin**

[Psalm 119:49–56](#) (ESV) **Remember your word** to your servant, in which you have **made me hope**. 50 This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise **gives me life**. 51 The insolent utterly deride me, but I do not turn away from your law. 52 When I think of your rules from of

old, I take comfort, O LORD. 53 Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked, who forsake your law. 54 Your **statutes have been my songs** in the house of my sojourning. 55 I remember your name in the night, O LORD, and keep your law. 56 This **blessing has fallen to me**, that I have kept your precepts.

**49Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope. 50This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life. 51The insolent utterly deride me, but I do not turn away from your law. 52When I think of your rules from of old, I take comfort, O Lord.**

**He sees himself as God's servant.** He's not the master, he's the slave, he's not the Potter he's the clay. He takes what God says personally. He knows its for him and so he hopes in God's word.

He experiences affliction. We will experience affliction. We will seek comfort in some way. It's just a matter of what. We trust God to develop a soft heart and thick skin or to be able to persevere when we are hurt without lashing out with passive aggressive statements that pass along our pain to others. In my case that could be trying to work hard and make sure that I get more and more tasks accomplished each day so that I can look at what I've done and know that I did my best regardless of the outcome. In other cases I might seek approval from someone else by complaining or grieving, hoping that someone will affirm me in my pain. And as I just heard my friend Michael Howard say, "Every complaint is ultimately a complaint against God and how he is running the world." But the Psalmist says "this is my comfort in my affliction that your promise gives me life." Thinking deeply about God's promise brings him comfort.

When he says, I do not turn away from your law. He means that he does not give himself permission to sin because he's been sinned against. He does return snide comments and an arrogant and critical spirit toward afflicting him in kind. Rather, he blesses those who curse him and he prays for those who would abuse him and he rejoices that he is counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus as Jesus himself said in the beatitudes.

We too can find comfort and hope in God's word when under affliction. But that doesn't happen automatically. it will take time. it will take effort. It will require tools. It requires the help of the Holy Spirit. It's understandable but it's not automatic.

**53Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked, who forsake your law.**

But this comfort does not mean that those who oppose him or those who ignore your word don't bother him.

We are called to be appropriately angry especially when the rejecting of God's word harms other people and when those who forsake God's law teach others to do the same. But we

should not forget that we too are sinners and that we too deserved the wrath of God and that our only hope is the promise of God's mercy and grace and not our outstanding obedience

There's a real danger for people who think of themselves as believers but whose identify is actually more with a political party. This can go both right and left. Some who are politically conservative and consider themselves to know God, relish this anger and celebrate political leaders who break the rules and speak condescendingly of other people and they are dead certain that that's the kind of leader we need. Many of those show no interest in God's word or God's people or God's church. But that attitude provides ammunition for the enemies of the cross to say look what effect that ancient book has on people. it makes them cruel. it makes them hateful. it makes them unpleasant, it makes them into the kind of person that no one would want for a neighbor or a coworker for a friend.

**54Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my sojourning. 55I remember your name in the night, O Lord, and keep your law.**

The house of my sojourning implies that the time of his life here on earth which from the New Testament perspective says this world is not my home. Singing the truth of God's word emboldens him to persevere.

He's not struggling to remember God's name like we might say, "what was the name of that person we just met, its to right on the tip of my tongue." Rather this remembering speaks of an intentional process to dwell on who God is in the middle of the night when he otherwise might be tempted to dwell on that which makes him anxious or causes him grief or tempts him to sin. He remembers God's name in the night.

Names had far more significance than we tend to give them now. Just like we emphasized the names of Madison and Declan and Jordan today and we talked about the significance of those names, this speaks to the need for us to remember who God is in the night when we're staring at the ceiling, when we're tempted to worry about everything imaginable. Instead, we order our brains to focus on who God is and what God says. We're being obedient to God in doing that because both in the Old Testament and in the new we are instructed not to be anxious Jesus said do not worry about your life do not worry about tomorrow. Place your trust in God.

**56This blessing has fallen to me, that I have kept your precepts.**

We know the writer does not think that he has done this perfectly. He prays for help in understanding, he prays for help in obedience, and he grieves that he's not been consistent. in saying "this blessing has fallen to me is an acknowledgement that it's only been by God's power and God's mercy to him that his mind that his heart has been awakened; that his mind



has been granted understanding, that the word of God has been shared with him and that by God's mercy there has been a measure of obedience. But that that is all a gift of God's grace. This blessing has fallen to him not because of his great performance.

So how can we cooperate with the Spirit to develop in us a soft heart but thick skin.

- Find comfort in God's promise by thinking deliberately about God's rules when we are hurting.
- Be suspicious of your anger & what it produces governing it through [James 1:20 James 1:19-20 \(ESV\)](#)  
**Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**

Express gratitude for all progress

**God's word is nothing like a fortune cookie message** you know came from a machine in a factory. I have never saved one of those. But I have saved many letters and notes Kat has written me over the years because they are from her. I have saved messages of encouragement from friends and church members over the years. It's not the words themselves that make them meaningful to me. It's because of who they are from. That's what makes the difference.

What makes the words of scripture meaningful is that they are from God.

That won't matter much without the world view that says that this same God is our creator who gave us instruction. However, without fail we all believed we knew better. We all said in one way or another, "I will do what I want with my mind and with my body." The Bible describes not just the actions that spring from that attitude, but the attitude itself as sin. That sin separates us from the source of hope, and life, and wisdom, and because of the separation it causes, we begin slowly and imperceptibly to die. No matter how much we protest that what we do privately doesn't harm anyone, sin always creates harm and accelerates our slow spiritual death. Unless someone solves this separation, it will ultimately lead to the greatest horror of loneliness, more awful than anyone on earth could imagine.

But God did not leave us to suffer in the stew of our making. He did not yell down from heaven saying, "let me know how that being free to live your own life works out for you." No, he sent his one and only son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." That word "belief" means more than mental assent that something is true, but it involves a sense of trust and of necessity that says, "I want Jesus. I want to know God. I must have what he offers as my only hope." This trust involves clinging more desperately to Jesus than a drowning person clings to a life preserver thrown to them.

The salvation God has thrown you is not an object, its Jesus himself who lived the life you should have lived, and died the death you deserved to die for your sin. When you trust in him,

he exchanges his life for yours so that new life can be your pleasure. He has no intention of leaving us where we are.

He became sin who knew no sin so that we might become the righteousness of Christ.

To all with whom this happens genuinely, good works and slow transformation will happen however imperfectly. But all that good progress comes after the free gift of salvation God offers us.