

Gene Cornett

Walking in the Word - Psalm 119 / Psalm 119:57-72

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Near the **end of the book the Two Towers**, and near the **beginning of the movie the Return of the King**, Gollum **leads Sam and Frodo** into a **dark tunnel**. Gollum knows, but they don't, that the tunnel houses a hideously large spider that Gollum knows will kill them. Then he can take the ring Frodo carries. Gollum **led** Frodo and Sam **into danger to serve himself** at their expense. Sam was suspicious all along, but Frodo naively trusted Gollum. It nearly cost him his life. Gollum had given them very little reason for them to trust him as their guide.

I struggle to trust God. We may secretly worry that somehow what the Bible offers must be too good to be true. Recently I was listening to a sermon by Michael Reeves, one of my favorite authors. He admits that one of his core temptations is to believe that God is not as gracious and that God is not as good as the Bible says.

I assume I've got to earn my standing before God. I assume that God is less good than he really is. I imagine him to be more devilish than he truly is, more like Gollum. So I need to remind myself every day of how perfect, how glorious, how beautiful he truly is. He's better than I ever make him out to be in my head.

He goes on to say that **Martin Luther had the same grief** but rather than using Romans or Galatians he wrote about **Song of songs 2:6** where the woman says. **"My beloved is mine. And I am his."** From that place Luther argued that the **grace that God gives us isn't like what he'd been thinking**. It isn't that God is there in heaven, giving out a spoonful of grace occasionally. There **have a bit of grace you dirty sinners**. Maybe this bit of grace will pump you up to do the right thing this time for once.

No, he says **grace is more like a marriage**. He told the story of a marriage between a king and a prostitute. No amount of good things the prostitute does will make her the king's wife. She becomes his wife only when the king says, "I take you to be mine."

Luther explains that we have the King and his prostitute who he's come to love. And **she says. "All that I am I give to you, your Majesty. And all that I have I share with you."** But what does she have? **Shame, dishonor, debts. Drug addiction**. She throws all her problems onto him and shares them with him. The **king says to her all that I am, I give to**

**You. all that I have I share with you. And at that moment, the prostitute becomes the queen.**

She **doesn't talk properly yet. she doesn't know courtly ways yet, but she is the queen.** And Luther said this is **how it is with becoming a Christian.** The Christian is **like the prostitute.** we've said to Jesus. **All that I have my sin, my death, my damnation, my judgment. I give to you. Take it all, Jesus.** And he takes it all, **condemns it all on the cross.** And he says **“all that I am all that I have. I share with you. I give to you. My life, my righteousness, my sonship, my eternal blessing. It's all yours.”**

This prostitute has a dual identity. She's still whorish in her ways, doesn't know the ways of the court yet but **she is the queen.** That is **her status.** So Christians. **We are at the same time sinners, failures in our ongoing lives.** Slowly adjusting to the ways of our great husband, slowly being changed. But we are a mess, failures. At the same time. we have the very righteousness and sonship of our great husband. And so the sinner said Luther can confidently display her sins in the face of death and hell and say if I've sinned, yet my Christ, in whom I believe has not sinned, and all his is mine. And all mine. Is his. <sup>1</sup>

**We require this radical image to help us trust that God is good and gracious so we will keep praying and relying on him.**

The writer of [Psalm 119](#) carefully constructed an **elaborate acrostic poem** celebrating the **goodness of God expressed to us through the glory of God's word.** It was **not to heap on us guilt for our failure** but to move us by God's goodness and grace. On the surface it seems like an impossibly long moral to do list to only remind us of what failures we are. But a **more accurate look shows the emphasis throughout to be on the God who spoke those words and his goodness to us in revealing himself through them.** Yes it speaks much of obedience but a **love based obedience fueled by constantly remembering the character of the one who communicates** with us.

Before we get into our Christmas series, we will look at one more section.

[Psalm 119:57-72](#) (ESV) The LORD is my portion; I promise to keep your words. I entreat your favor with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise. When I think on my ways, I turn my feet to your testimonies; I hasten and do not delay to keep your commandments. Though the cords of the wicked ensnare me, I do not forget your law. At midnight I rise to praise you, because of your righteous rules. I am a companion of all who

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<sup>1</sup> [What Union with Christ Means](#) by Delighting in the Trinity with Michael Reeves

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fear you, of those who keep your precepts. The earth, O LORD, is full of your steadfast love; teach me your statutes! You have dealt well with your servant, O LORD, according to your word. Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word. You are good and do good; teach me your statutes. The insolent smear me with lies, but with my whole heart I keep your precepts; their heart is unfeeling like fat, but I delight in your law. It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes. The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

## How can you trust that God is good and that he will respond with grace to your prayer for help?

### 1. Truths to Trust

#### a. God is my source

**v. 57 The LORD is my portion; I promise to keep your words.**

The phrase says **more than that God provides for him, it means that God himself is the provision** that he needs. His **identity, his help, his comfort** come from God which **prompts him to his intention** to give himself to **keeping God's words or obedience**.

Experiencing God as your provision is how you know who you are. We live in a time of tumultuous change in the world, in the country, and even in our own church. If we find our identity in anything other than Christ, we will be undone. That security provides greater motivation to obedience because God being the source of our security and identify means that what he wants for us is what we want to be and do because it is who we are.

#### b. God is good

**68 You are good and do good; teach me your statutes.**

God himself defines what is good. We can know that God is good and that he **always acts consistently with his nature. He cannot do otherwise**. This knowledge leads us to pray, "teach me your statutes," and helps us accept authority. **The** authorities God has placed in our lives are for our good. We **tend to think we have outgrown the need for authority**, but we have not and our **resistance as adults to follow any leader reflects an unwillingness to follow God**. Trusting that God is good helps us overcome this.

c. God's rules are righteous

**62 At midnight I rise to praise you, because of your righteous rules.**

Because God is good, and he does good, his rules are for our good. The rules themselves are righteous. We need to think this through and recognize that it's true and trust it.

I'm **not sure we often think about worshiping God for his righteous rules**. Through **trusting that God's rules are righteous we learn to not be embarrassed about specific commands** of God when we are tempted to wish a specific instruction was not there. We recognize there must be something deficient in our grasp of the purpose of God's instruction is in that circumstance.

d. God's love is persistent

**64 The earth, O LORD, is full of your steadfast love; teach me your statutes!**

He knows that **God's love persists when others would give up** loving. This knowledge of God's love **reminds him further that God has his best in mind for him**. He knows that he does **not know God's statutes as well as he needs to know them**. He recognizes he has **not internalized** these truths to the extent that it helps him to obey consistently and that **lack has led to grief in his life**. So knowing God's steadfast love **prompts him to pray** "teach me your statutes."

e. God uses affliction for our good

**65 You have dealt well with your servant, O LORD, according to your word.**

How often I am **tempted to argue with God and ask him why he has allowed me to go through so much frustration**. But every time I complain my **complaint is ultimately against God** and I reveal that I have **stopped believing what the Psalmist believes**. Every time i **compare my circumstance** with someone else's and think that they have gotten a better deal from God, I have **stopped believing that God has dealt well with his servant**. When I complain that God has allowed this or that thing to happen making my life harder, I am **forgetting the mercy and patience of God and I am forgetting the darkness of my sin**.

**67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.**

This remind me of [1 Peter 4:1-2](#) Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.

[James 1:2-4](#) Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

This is why Paul could say in [Romans 5:3-5](#) Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

**71 It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.**

We can't learn some aspects of God's truth without affliction. Do you believe that there is a gap between what you know and what you need to know and to the extent that this true, that it is harming you and that you would be greatly helped to learn it, to know it? Do we believe that we are still in the school of learning? Do we believe really, that we have not arrived? Do your daily habits reflect that you believe this, that you still need to learn God's statutes? Even if we had it all memorized we would still need to keep applying it to new situations.

Those truths: God is my source, God is good, God's rules are good, his love is persistent, and God uses difficulty for our good provoke these actions.

**How can you trust that God is good and that he will respond with grace to your prayer for help?**

## 2. Actions to Take

a. Pray for God's [help](#)

v. 58 I entreat your favor with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise.

He **speaks very personally**, I entreat your favor with all my heart.

He would **not pray this way unless he trusted that God is good** and gracious.

He **entreats, that's a strong word**. He entreats God's favor, God's intervention in his circumstances. He does this with all his heart. He prays with such intensity because he's confident that God will be gracious to him according to his promise. This is very different than thinking that you must earn the right to ask.

We **pray too glibly for God's favor outside of the context of trusting that God has been good in our affliction.** Praying for God's favor and intervention does not mean that we think he's going to grant us smooth sailing but that he will meet us in our difficulty.

**b. Live a life of repentance**

**v. 59 When I think on my ways, I turn my feet to your testimonies;**

The Psalmist examines his lifestyle and he determines what needs to be different, he turns his feet to God's testimonies. The **phrase provokes an image** that does more than say, "I'm ready to obey." it pictures repentance. He turns his feet to God's testimonies. **When a runner lines up to run a race, she doesn't turn her feet in a different direction, they are aimed in the direction she plans to run.** This speaks to having a plan.

**c. Plan according to God's word**

God does not intend for us to squander our resources. You have a degree of energy, skill, resources, and opportunities. God intends that his people think about this wise use of these gifts from him, not to earn his love, but because of who you are as an act of gratitude. When you think on your ways, when you plan your life, you turn your feet to God's testimonies. You make a plan to do what God calls you to do.

Recently I read about a person who writes their goals down 2x per day. I have written annual goals for years but am thrilled to have a bit of accountability to help me with that. All of us need accountability. Regardless, I have discovered that I can write down a short version of my goals in 2 minutes and I have been doing that every day. Because when I think on my ways, because I belong to God and he is my portion, I want to turn my feet to God's testimonies. I want to do God's will and I want to build routines into my life that I may do just this.

**d. Obey eagerly**

**60 I hasten and do not delay to keep your commandments.**

God calls his people to **neither be in a hurry nor to procrastinate** on the good works God prompts them to do. The **faithful disciple feeds her faithfulness with Word-guided pondering and planning.**

There's a **place for simply doing what God says**, but we must remembered that this is **fueled by delight in God and what he says. Without** the delight, the obedience will be **resented and cannot be sustained.**

**e. Redirect your worries**

**62 At midnight I rise to praise you, because of your righteous rules**

He's so convinced of this truth, then when he wakes in the middle of the night praises God because of his righteous rules rather than focusing on what would worry him. He **orders his mind to focus on the goodness of God in communicating his will to us**. We can do this by reviewing memorized scripture and by rehearsing the attributes of God. I did this this very morning. God you are good, you are eternal, you are all knowing and all powerful. You are wise. You are righteous. You are the God of love and mercy and grace. You are the judge of all the earth.

**f. Develop humility**

**64 teach me your statutes**

We emphasized last week that we don't outgrow the need to pray this. Let's pray that God shows us the distinction between where we are and where we need to be. Because knowing that God is good, In that moment we have the sweet experience of both knowing we fall short but immediately being reassured of the mercy of God. Getting to experience God's goodness and mercy both honors God and delights us more than if we had never sinned.

**66 Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments.**

We can know that God's word is **good, but we don't remember what we need to remember in the moment**. We don't have the mental ability to pull in all the relevant truths to our minds to make good judgements. In short we need wisdom. You have given you life to Jesus based on what God has revealed to you through his word, but you can't sort through all of the data in the moment. Wrong information beats down the door of your attention.

**g. Choose your allies wisely (not in slides i don't think)**

**61 Though the cords of the wicked ensnare me, I do not forget your law . . . 63 I am a companion of all who fear you, of those who keep your precepts.**

**This reminds me of Frodo seeking to wack his way out of the web of a giant spider with a sword.**

The culture teaches all of us but especially the young through entertainment and in some cases schools, to question who they are. They are encouraged to think they can learn to feel better about themselves by becoming more focused on themselves and their own feelings and in some cases by manipulating their bodies and never having to hear anything that sounds threatening.

Jesus made it clear that the way to find yourself is to lose it in service to him and others, by dying to ourselves. When we trust that God actually seeks our good, we will persevere to actively remember what God says and to take our clues from him. **But since much of our entertainment normalizes what God says will harm us, we start not trusting God and trusting people who hate us.** Those in the culture loudly protesting to give children the power to mutilate their bodies that **play the role of Gollum to entrap children for their own private purposes.**

**Verse 63 helps you know who your real friends are.** The Psalmist knows who is on his team. **I am a companion of all those who fear you of those who keep your precepts.**

Adults need good role models. Through politics we face unprecedented confusion. Some are choosing poor models to follow who sound like an ally, because they would vote the way you would vote on a few issues, but who display a harsh and cruel hatred for their political enemies that denies that they know anything about the grace of God, fearing God, and obeying God's word.

**How can you trust that God is good and that he will respond with grace to your prayer for help?**

**Trust that God is your source, God is good, his rules are righteous, his love is persistent, and he uses affliction for your good prompts us to pray for help, live a life of repentance, plan according to God's word, obey eagerly, redirect worry, develop humility, and choose our allies wisely. That's how we stay on course.**

## **Conclusion**

And as Luther would say when the devil throws up our sins to us and declares that we deserve death and hell. We ought to speak like this. I admit I deserve death and hell. What of it? What of it? Does this mean I shall be sentenced to eternal damnation? by no means, for I know one who has suffered and made satisfaction in my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, the son of God, and where he is there I shall be also.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [What Union with Christ Means](#) by Delighting in the Trinity with Michael Reeves



You can trust Jesus. Unlike Gollum who led Frodo and Sam into danger to serve his own needs. Jesus walked into danger and and suffered for God's glory and your good.