

The sermon

Intro

Have you ever been at a place where you don't see a path forward?

Stuck in a miserable job that's going nowhere. Stuck in a miserable relationship that's torment day after day. Piles of debt that will take years to get out of. A health condition that will only worsen short of a miracle.

How do we go on? I think Psalm 119 has some answers.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Passage Focus

Three points this morning.

Point 1: God's word provides direction in hard times (105-106)

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. – 119:105

The idea is I wouldn't know where to go. Which way to turn. How to process life. If I didn't have God's word.

Light is critical when traveling. If we don't have light, we're either going nowhere or subjecting ourselves to unknown hazards. We might wind up in a ditch. We might get caught in a bird trap. We might stumble over a rock.

Ever driven in a blizzard when the wipers couldn't keep up? I have. Ever driven during a hurricane when the wipers couldn't keep up? I have. It's hard, even scary when you can't see where you're going.

Illustration: Boston driving

When I lived a bit closer, I used to drive to Boston somewhat frequently. The airport and Celtics games. Sometimes I winged it. A horrific mistake. Sometimes I got directions to the game but didn't bother to get directions home. Awful. One wrong turn in Boston and it's really hard to recover. I couldn't figure out how to get back to where I was, let alone where I wanted to be. On more than one occasion my soul was deeply disturbed (in anguish) because I was driving in Boston without directions.

It can be torturous when you're lost and don't know where you're going.

Before the days of the GPS, when I went on the internet and printed out my directions, I was able to get to and from the TD Garden without a hitch. Peace of mind. A soul at rest.

It all depended on whether or not I had the driving directions.

God's word shines light on the right direction to go, the right paths to take.

Hard times

I said **God's word provides direction in hard times**. Darryl read a bit about the Psalmist's hard times at the start of the service. Stuff like being treated with scorn and contempt and plots against him.

The Psalmist was despised. In danger. God's word shines the path forward when life is brutal.

When you can't see the way forward you're not in a good place.

How should we move forward in hard times? With passion to obey all that God has commanded.

I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules. – 119:106

With God's word, we have direction in life. We have a reason to wake up in the morning. What is that direction? Obeying God's commands. That's learning and doing all that Jesus has commanded!

So the Psalmist has sworn an oath. To keep (= obey) God's commands. And he's confirmed it. Meaning they are keeping their oath. They are faithfully, consistently, though not perfectly obeying God's word. The Bible can speak of a person being above reproach, blameless, faithful, obedient without indicating the absence of sin. The Psalmist is consistently obedient.

What's an oath? A verbal assurance, a guarantee, a promise that I'll keep my word. The oath is made to God. Something like, "God, my aim in life is to obey all of your commands. I'll do everything in my power to obey you." That's a godly life goal. A focus on practice.

Christian

Christian, there's questions we should ask ourselves. Am I walking according to God's word? Is my life going in the direction of God's commands? Or am I going in a different direction?

Do I know God's word well enough to choose the right paths?

Crazy idea. We can be doing life wrong. Have you ever considered the possibility? Have you ever asked yourself, am I going about this matter God's way? Have you ever turned to the Bible specifically for the purpose of finding answers to a moral dilemma?

Areas I've examined include choosing a spouse, raising children, honoring father and mother, navigating entertainment, theological disagreement in the church, etc.

Application

Christian, are you going through the motions? Are you wondering what to do with your life? Are you in need of direction? The Psalmist says make your aim in life the keeping of God's commands. Set your attention on this. This isn't to say we can't enjoy simple pleasures like cooking or sewing or sports or travel. But the driving force in life has to be obeying God's commands. This is what gives shape to our existence. With the abundance of commands in God's word, there's always something to aim for. **We should never say I'm bored.** There's always commands to keep. Always commands to learn.

Children, having goals is a good thing. To have the right goals, we need God's word. The purpose of life isn't acquiring things or finding something fun to do or dulling ourselves with entertainment. The purpose of life is keeping all of God's commands. Honoring God.

Children, obeying God's commands ranges from meditating on God's word day and night (that's thinking about God's word throughout the day) to telling the truth to working hard to encouraging other people to serving in the church.

If anything, this means we need to know our Bibles. We need to search our Bibles for direction. Meaning we need to remember, meditate on, and memorize the commands we're encountering.

Sad plight

There's a sad scenario painted here. The one without the light can't see, so they're unable to get on the right path. Because they can't see, they're subjected to dangers of being on the wrong path. No word means no direction. Those without God's word are like a traveler without a GPS or a compass. They keep going down the wrong paths. They need God's word.

God's word provides direction in hard times.

And no direction is a pretty bad place to be when life is hard times.

Point 2: God's word sustains us in hard times (107-110)

I am severely afflicted; give me life, O LORD, according to your word! – 119:107

Severely indicates intensity. Afflicted means his life experience is miserable and his life is in danger. In the Psalm, he's:

- 1) Despised (v. 141)
- 2) Without cause (v. 161)
- 3) Subjected to verbal abuse (vv. 22, 39, 42)
- 4) Subjected to false charges (v. 78)
- 5) Subjected to plots against him (v. 23)

and

- 6) He's almost been killed (v. 87).

In other words, he's been the victim of oppression (vv. 121-22, 134). He's hated without cause. His rights have been taken away. He's the victim of the powerful. His life is a living misery. He's afraid he's going to be killed.

"give me life, O LORD" means rescue me from death. Act for me God. Frustrate the plots of my enemies.

"according to your word" indicates he believes there's promises in the Old Testament that gives him some sense of confidence that God is going to help him. God, your word promises rescue, so act for me.

What promise is he clinging to? Maybe he's thinking about God's past acts? Like when God acted for Israel against Egypt at the Red Sea. Maybe he sees patterns that he believes will be repeated? Maybe he's thinking about promises in the Law of Moses? Where if the nation obeys the LORD blessing will follow (Deut 28:1-14). He's loving God and obeying God and holding fast to God so surely God will come to his aid (Deut 30:15-20).

Whatever the case, facing death and enduring a miserable existence, the Psalmist sees a glimmer of hope! He expects God to act for him.

Accept my freewill offerings of praise, O LORD, and teach me your rules. – 119:108

"freewill offerings of praise" literally translates *"freewill offerings of my mouth."* Meaning the idea here is verbal offerings of praise, not animal sacrifices. That's speaking well about God during prayer as we reflect on his power or mercy or wisdom.

That's praise amidst horrific suffering. When we remember who God is, we kindle hope!

Despite his circumstances, he hasn't given up on spiritual advancement. He still wants to learn more. He believes ignorance remains. He believes God gives understanding. Verbal praise gives way to a longing to learn more.

I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law. – 119:109

The phrase *"I hold my life in my hand continually"* indicates his life is at risk. He's grasping his life tightly to protect it because he believes it could be taken away. Continually. No let up. The torment won't subside. The threat of death is constant.

Again, despite his circumstances, spiritual ambitions haven't fell to the wayside. He hasn't forget what he's already learned. He's frequently bringing God's word to mind. He's memorized truth.

The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts. – 119:110

Snare indicates a bird trap. Either a net or a loop or noose that catches the heel. Booby traps have been set and they're waiting for him to get caught. Life is a minefield. A miserable existence.

Once again, despite his circumstances, spiritual ambitions haven't fell to the wayside. He's continuing to keep his oath to God.

Application

There's some spiritual gold here.

Rough circumstances haven't turned him away from God. Rough circumstances have turned him to God. When life is hard and miserable we can turn in a variety of directions.

1. We can blame God and charge him with wrong = sin. (see Job's wife)
2. We can dull ourselves with entertainment or leisure.
3. We can dull ourselves with possessions.
4. We can dull ourselves with drugs or alcohol.
5. Or we can turn to God.

What's the spiritual antidote to hard times? What do we do when life seems too much to bear and doom's lurking around the corner?

1. Remember God's word.

We can always reminds ourselves of God's character, God's actions, God's promises.

Who he is. How he acts for his people. How he will act for his people. That's confidence in who God is for us.

2. Turn to God's word for more understanding.

Seek his guidance for navigating hard times. Let hardship be a time of learning.

3. Obey what you know.

We can remind ourselves of our spiritual duties. Purpose remains in hard times. Have confidence that God is at work in you (Phil 2:12-13).

I'm struggling deeply. I'm worn out by life. Health problems won't let up. Financial problems won't let up. Relational challenges won't let up. The bullying, the insults and accusations and dangers and hatred won't let up.

What do I need? God's word. Because God's word directs our gaze towards God. The God who loves his people. The God who sustains his people. The God who acts for his people. The God who keeps his promises. The God who will finally deliver his people when Jesus returns.

God's word sustains us in hard times.

Point 3: God's word creates joy in hard times (111-112)

The Psalmist is being bullied mercilessly. But the dominant impulse in his heart isn't anger at God or quitting on God or turning to wine or total despair or plotting revenge. No, the dominant impulse in his heart is passion to obey God. Despite his circumstances, joy remains.

Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart. – 119:111

What's the source of his joy? You guessed it. God's word.

“testimonies” meaning God’s law. By heritage he means an inheritance, possession. God’s law is his possession forever. He’ll always have God’s law. It’s not going anywhere. It doesn’t wear out like clothing and couches and TV’s and vehicles.

Meaning the realities promised in God’s law are his forever: eternal life, forgiveness of sins.

He finds joy (gladness, happiness, pleasure) in God’s law. Why?

1. God’s word gives life direction.

Puts us on the path of blessing.

2. God’s word protects us from hazards.

God’s word gets us in step with the fabric of the universe. God knows how people are supposed to do life in God’s world.

3. God’s word is full of promises.

Who God is for us today. What God will do for us in the future. God’s word tells us we’re not alone when being bullied mercilessly. **God’s word tells us there’s a God who acts in us and acts for us!**

I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end. – 119:112

Because of his attitude towards God’s word, he’s resolved to endure whatever befalls him by learning and obeying God’s word.

“incline” = he turns his heart’s attention (thoughts, attitudes, desires, loves) toward God’s word. God’s word is the focus of his learning, meditation, and practice. He’s set his heart on God’s word. He’s set his heart on knowing and doing.

In the midst of life-threatening torment, his focus remains God’s word. He knows what he needs to carry him through.

He’s choosing to set his attention on the right things. But the Psalmist elsewhere concedes he can’t do this on his own. He needs God’s help to know (119:108) and do God’s word.

Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! – 119:36

He’s fighting a battle against his sinful nature. At the same time, he recognizes his need for God to direct his heart. So he prays for God to turn his heart in the right direction.

We need God’s help to keep God’s commands. Evidently God helped him. Because he’s confirmed his oath (119:106). He’s keeping his promise to obey.

Application

When he sets his heart in the right place (God’s word), joy is the result. There’s hope for strugglers in God’s word. Joy can be had, regardless of your circumstances.

God’s word can produce in you joy that’s lacking. God’s word can produce in you peace that’s lacking. God’s word can produce in you faith that’s lacking.

Non-Christian

What should I do? Read God’s word. Read the Gospel of John. Keep coming every Sunday.

What you’ll find is God has answers for our sinful condition. God’s word speaks to us when we’re afraid or confused or being sinned against.

Walking in the light begins with trusting Jesus.

First, believe that Jesus died on the cross for sinners.

Make the personal connection. I'm a sinner. There's hope for me.

Second, confess your sins to God.

Third, ask God for forgiveness.

Fourth, trust God's promise. That Jesus died and rose again so that whoever believes can be forgiven and have eternal life.

After we believe God doesn't leave us to ourselves. He gives us direction. He sustains us. He works joy in our hearts.

God helps those who trust in him.

Conclusion

The antidote for hard times is God's word. Read it. Study it. Memorize it. Remember it. Trust it. Obey it.