



PSALM 119, Part 17

Pe

This is Holly with Presence Point and welcome to week 17 of *Psalms for Shepherds* series. Today, we're looking at verses 129 through 136. This stanza of the psalm is based on the 17th letter of the Hebrew alphabet, known as Pe, which in Hebrew means mouth. I have not spoken of the meaning of the Hebrew letters during this *Psalms for Shepherds* series, but I've been so drawn to the meaning with this particular letter. The fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet also means "mouth", but interestingly it means breathing, breath, Spirit, and revelation. Pe, the letter associated with these 16 verses, however, means speech, the spoken word, testimony.

As we read *Psalms for Shepherds*, verses 129 through 136, pay close attention to why this letter of the Hebrew alphabet was used with this passage.

¹²⁹ Your testimonies are wonderful;
therefore, my soul keeps them.

¹³⁰ The unfolding of your words gives light;
it imparts understanding to the simple.

¹³¹ I open my mouth and pant,
because I long for your commandments.

¹³² Turn to me and be gracious to me,
as is your way with those who love your name.

¹³³ Keep steady my steps according to your promise,
and let no iniquity get dominion over me.

¹³⁴ Redeem me from man's oppression,
that I may keep your precepts.

¹³⁵ Make your face shine upon your servant,
and teach me your statutes.

¹³⁶ My eyes shed streams of tears,
because people do not keep your law.

There is so much truth in this short passage:

- God's testimonies are wonderful
- His Word does give light, as well as understanding
- His way toward those who love Him is, in fact, to turn toward us and be gracious to us

- He does redeem us from our oppression
- He surely shines His face upon us, and
- He does give us a passion for those who do not know and love the Father.

This short passage is absolutely chock full of wonderful truths. But even with all of them in mind, to me, it feels like the real power in this passage is in the reminder in verse 133. The ESV reads, "Keep steady my steps according to your promise, and let no iniquity get dominion [or autocratic rule] over me."

The New Living Translation of that verse says, "Guide my steps by your word, so I will not be overcome by evil."

And The Message translation reads: "Steady my steps with your Word of promise so nothing malign [or nothing harmful, hurtful, or damaging] gets the better of me."

The truth found in *Psalms 119*, verse 133 is this: our Lord can keep sin from getting the better of us, from having dominion over us.

You know, it seems that we often use so many excuses as to why we sin, that we forget so many passages like Peter's reminder that "We have been given everything we need for life and godliness". Or Paul's admonition to live a godly life.

The Holy Spirit would not have breathed these words into these men for our edification and benefit if we could not, in fact, accomplish them! Not letting sin overcome us is not just an aspirational thought or a hopeful goal, but can be our experience as shepherding believers.

Interestingly, Timothy and Juliet Tennent, authors of a book called, *A Meditative Journey Through the Psalms*, focus their efforts from this passage on verse 133, as well. As the Tennents note, "... we can live in a way that sin does not rule over us. This verse does not say that we will be without sin in our lives. Christians will always need to confess sins, but sin should be our mortal enemy and never rule over us."

It's important to remember that cannot happen on our own. The Tennent's go on to say this: "There is a gap between our theology of sin (sin is bad and should not rule over us) and our experience as Christians living in a fallen world." They go on to say, "The repeated answer in this psalm is to keep our focus and constant meditation upon God and his Word. It is when our minds begin to wander and contemplate sin, or begin to compare what we have with what someone else has, and so forth, that we find ourselves drawn, once again, into the trap of sin."

The letter James, the brother of Jesus, wrote to the Jewish believers living outside of Israel, said this about sin, "Each one [that includes us] is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged

away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

The Tennents write: "How do we escape this trip?, meaning this trip of being dragged away and enticed, well, if we skip ahead two passages or two Hebrew letters in *Psalm 119*, we find the answer: verse 147 tells us that we should "rise before dawn and cry for help".

As Timothy and Juliet Tennent emphasize, we need to "establish a daily rhythm of focus upon the Lord and his righteous path. This means that each day should begin with an earnest prayer before God. This is not a rushed 'Bless me, O God' as we grab a bagel and head out of the door for the day. This is getting up before dawn so we can sit in his presence. Then, throughout the day, we should 'meditate on His promises'. Finally, if we awaken or have sleepless nights, we should take the opportunity to think about the things of God rather than have our minds drift into anxiety or into areas that will lay a sinful trap for us. The psalmist says," the Tennents continue, "that even if he is awake during 'the watches of the night', he will meditate on the Lord."

Scripture teaches, and the Tennents emphasize, "that the real insight of the Psalm is that we have no power in our own strength to live a life so that sin does not rule over us. But, if we abide in Christ, then He has the power, through the Holy Spirit, to daily draw us to himself and to direct our feet, our hands, our hearts, and our minds into the ways of righteousness."

Psalm 119, verse 133: "Keep steady my steps according to your promise, and let no iniquity get dominion over me." Our Good Shepherd will keep that promise, fellow under-shepherd. He will help us keep our steps steady and He will not let sin have dominion over us. And we must do our part, as well: Begin our days by crying out to him, and stay focused on Him throughout the day. In essence, abide in Him. All day, every day. Never waiver from keeping our minds fixed on Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith, our Good, Great, and Chief Shepherd.

As shepherd leaders, we are, in fact, sinful shepherds leading sinful sheep. Our temptations may include favoritism among the sheep of our pasture, or pride in our accomplishments or the accomplishments of our team. They could include an unhealthy frustration or anger with those who do not follow God's ways or those who think or live or act differently than we believe they should. Our temptation may be toward fear, and the accompanying need to micro-manage or refuse to delegate work that can be shared with those capable of doing it. Or our temptations may be lust or gluttony, envy, or covetousness or greed. Whatever tempts you the most and it does not matter whether it is an addiction or an occasional attraction or enticement you can live in a way that does not let that sin get dominion over you. It is really your choice, fellow under-shepherd. Giving into the temptation will always produce a negative situation in your flock, because as Scripture teaches us sin always separates us from God, us from others, and, even, us from ourselves.

The question then is this: How willing are you to move from separation to community? Even, or especially, with the flock you shepherd. Be encouraged to spend time contemplating that question, evaluating how you are living, if you are crying out to the Father, longing after His Word, and meditating on Him and His Words day and night because that is the only sure-fire way that you will not be overcome by evil and that nothing harmful, hurtful, or damaging will get the better of you.

Thank you for joining me this week. May you live deeply into your calling to shepherd well all those entrusted to your care.