



## PSALM 119, Part 19

Qoph

This is Holly with Presence Point and welcome to week 19 of *Psalms for Shepherds* series. Today, we're looking at verses 145 through 152, the stanza of this psalm that is based on the 19<sup>th</sup> letter of the Hebrew alphabet, Qoph.

Just a quick note here. I hope you give me grace with the pronunciation of the Hebrew alphabet. Between my inexperience with Hebrew and my understanding that this letter is the most difficult of the Hebrew alphabet to pronounce, the 19<sup>th</sup> letter of the Hebrew alphabet was especially difficult. I want so much to treat this beautiful language with respect and authority.

As we read these eight verses of *Psalms 119*, listen for how wholeheartedly the psalmist prays.

*Psalms 119*, verses 145 through 152:

<sup>145</sup> With my whole heart I cry; answer me, O Lord!

I will keep your statutes.

<sup>146</sup> I call to you; save me, that I may observe your testimonies.

<sup>147</sup> I rise before dawn and cry for help;

I hope in your words.

<sup>148</sup> My eyes are awake before the watches of the night,

that I may meditate on your promise.

<sup>149</sup> Hear my voice according to your steadfast love;

O Lord, according to your justice give me life.

<sup>150</sup> They draw near who persecute me with evil purpose;

they are far from your law.

<sup>151</sup> But you are near, O Lord,

and all your commandments are true.

<sup>152</sup> Long have I known from your testimonies

that you have founded them forever.

The author of *Psalms 119* is clearly a man who is deeply committed to communicating with the Father. It's interesting to note that in verse 145 when the psalmist said, "With my whole heart, I cry", he was saying that with his whole heart, he prayed, because the same Hebrew verb translates "I cry", also translates "I pray".

And isn't that what prayer is intended to be—a cry out to our Father—whether it is in gratitude, or hope, or in fear. Think of the times Jesus cried out to his Abba as he prayed. He was beseeching His Father to hear, to listen, to answer, just as the psalmist is doing in this portion of the acrostic known to us as *Psalms 119*.

It seems David (if he is the author of this psalm) was not just crying out to God, but was calling on the Father to save him. In one sense, he sounds desperate to me. He promised to keep God's statutes, he asked to stay alive so that he would observe God's testimonies and statutes, and verse 147 says that he arose before the sun was up to cry out for help. Yet in another sense, he is not desperate at all. He knows, as he sung in his closing verse of this passage, that our God is near, that His commandments are true, and that long he has known that God's testimonies, His instructions, were established to last forever. In that, the psalmist, as we should, rests in peace even in the midst of a difficult situation. Yet, he still in the early morning hours (before 3am, before the watch of the night) spent time before the Father with his request.

I think many of us awake during the night, in the early morning hours, and talking to God is simply the last resort when we cannot get back to sleep. In fact, if we're honest, we begin to pray hoping that amidst our conversation with our God, we will fall back to sleep. But the Hebrew verb the psalmist used is the same verb used for "I stay awake" and "I arise early". It seems he may well have deliberately arisen early to pray and deliberately wanted to stay awake to plead his case before the Father, as verse 148 says, "My eyes are awake before the watches of the night" (remember, that's before 3am), so that he could meditate on God's promise.

Those persecuting him were doing so with evil purpose, and they were far from God's law, the psalmist wrote. As the Father's under-shepherds with sheep that we may, from time to time, believe are persecuting us with evil purpose or making our lives unimaginably difficult, we must turn first to the Father. Those circumstances require wholehearted prayer, without ceasing even in the very early hours of the morning while those around us are fast asleep.

But we must remember, as Bible Commentator, Warren Wiersbe, reminds us, we must be cautious about how we view prayer, because "too often we think of prayer as an emergency measure, rushing into God's presence and crying for help. But what would you think of children who spoke only to their parents when they needed something?", he notes. "Prayer is more than asking; prayer is loving. If we love the Word of God, we must also love the God of the Word and express that love to Him. To tell Him we love Him only because we want to receive something is to practice prayer on a juvenile level. When we share our love with the Lord, we receive new life from Him."

This passage is then a reminder to us as under-shepherds, to go often to the Father on our behalf and on behalf of the sheep in our lives and to do so as an act of love, with our eyes open, to watch and pray as Nehemiah did, and as Jesus, Paul, and Peter commanded us "to watch and pray", to be

alert, ready, and aware of what is happening around us, because as Wiersbe alerts, "We are soldiers in a battle and we dare not go to sleep while on duty."

We are, in fact, on duty, fellow shepherd. We are, in fact, responsible for those we lead, for how we influence those with whom we come in contact, for the behaviors we demonstrate, for watching out for the well-being of those who report to us, of those we report to, and of those we work, stand, and fight with, at home, at church, and in our communities.

I pray that we will often reach out to the Father in love, not with an ask, but in gratitude. And may we, in fact, remember that we are in a battle, that the sheep of our pasture are counting on us, and that we dare not go to sleep.

Thank you for joining me this week for the *Psalms for Shepherds* podcast. It is always a joy to prepare for our time together. Take care.