

Title: Praying with Assurance

Description: In this Sunday evening message from Psalm 119:145-152, Pastor Anthony Kim of Calvary Road Baptist Church calls believers out of cold, routine prayer into the psalmist's wholehearted cry: Hear me, save me, and I will keep thy statutes. Drawing often on the Puritan Thomas Manton, the sermon shows how God uses sharp trials to wake us from false security, why He rejects a divided heart, and how the psalmist rose before dawn and kept the night watches to hope in and meditate on God's word. It grounds assurance in prayer on God's lovingkindness and His righteous judgments, sets the nearness of the Lord against enemies who draw near, and rests on testimonies founded for ever, made sure for sinners through Christ, who was forsaken on the cross so that we might be brought near to God.

Transcript:

There are seasons in the human life when trouble no longer stays at a comfortable distance, closes in on us like a dark tide. And you feel the pressure whether in your home or in your health or in your finances or in your exhausted spirit. And in those hours, crying does not stop after childhood. Grown men and women cry out when the weight of life becomes too heavy to bear.

Yet, how often do our prayers in times of crisis feel cold? Often like another routine, mechanical, as if you're throwing empty words at a brass ceiling without any real expectation of an answer. When relief is delayed, a dangerous doubt whispers in the quiet corners of your soul. Does God really care about my situation? Can God actually do anything about my situation?

When weariness sets in, our greatest danger is not merely that we face the hardship, but that we begin to give God only a fraction of our hearts. Only a fraction of our hearts.

As 17th century Puritan theologian Thomas Manton warned, "If we can get a carnal pillow and bolster under our heads, we sleep and dream many a golden dream of ease and safety. Now God, who is jealous of our trust, will not let us alone, and therefore will put us upon sharp trials."

Let me just explain what he was saying here. When he talks about the carnal pillow that we put our heads to rest every night, it's a picture of false comfort because deep comfort in worldly things, resting your minds on worldly circumstances rather than on God is one of those dangers. When he talks

about we sleep and dream many a golden dream of ease and safety that's complacency that's spiritual sleep again Christians only here because unbelievers are dead in sins and trespasses as Christians we can be in a spiritual sleep that the fantasy we're perfectly safe and secure forgetting that worldly peace is temporary and fragile.

And then he goes on and says, "Now God who is jealous of our trust." This is talking about divine love. That trusting anything else besides the heavenly father will ultimately ruin us. Refusing to trust than worldly things is where a Christian must be. And then he goes on and says, "Will not let us alone and therefore put us upon sharp trials." That's the wake-up call. Trials for the Christian are wake-up calls.

So the warning is against spiritual danger of self-reliance, complacency, and false security. God loves us too much to let us stay asleep in a false reality to realize our vulnerability and look back to him for true security.

On the region in the original Hebrew structure of Psalm 119, this stanza we're going to go to if you will turn to Psalm 119. 119. And we're going to be starting in verse 145 this evening. And as you're turning there, the stanza begins with the letter Koph. Now, what does this mean? It means it's a visual picture of the horizon. Horizon at sunrise. Looking out in the distance at sunrise. Or it can mean the eye of a needle.

Let me explain the horizon at sunrise. This symbolizes looking beyond physical appearances to eternal spiritual sight. And then the eye of a needle. It's often connected with leaving behind the world sinful ways and pressing through narrow paths like the eye of a needle to follow after Christ.

Koph also comes from the Hebrew word for holy or set apart. So you can understand the deep meaning behind this stanza. See for Christians this echoes the divine call to holiness as we see in 1 Peter 1:15-16. "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation," in all that you do, "because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy," which was achieved through the redemptive work as we know in the Lord Jesus Christ, a redemptive work of saving us from our sins and then now setting us apart to live holy. And so in 1 Peter 2:9, as I preached from this text many months ago, the text I preached was 1 Peter 2:9, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

So I opened up the introduction. Let us now stand please out of respect for God's word as we look at verse 145.

"I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O Lord: I will keep thy statutes. I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies. I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word. Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word. Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness: O Lord, quicken me according to thy judgment. They draw nigh that follow after mischief: they are far from thy law. Thou art near, O Lord; and all thy commandments are truth. Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever."

This is God's word. You may be seated.

I want you to look at verse 145 where he's the psalmist says these words, I cried with my whole heart. Whole heart. This is earnest supplication. The theme and tone by the way of verse 145 and 146 speaks about earnest supplication. If you don't know what that means, the word supplication means a heartfelt petition from a place of recognizing human weakness and total dependence on God. Not casual asking but personal need that we are spiritually deficient in the areas of wisdom. So you pray Lord I lack wisdom or you pray I lack strength or protect me resist temptation or if you have an inability to overcome some personal sin and spiritual warfare is then well given over because you have allowed Satan to take a stronghold.

And so the apostle Paul and also Apostle Peter directly pairs supplication with casting off anxiety. There's no formal elaborate or polished prayer here. The psalmist is crying out with his whole heart. Doesn't have time to make his prayers elaborate. He is pouring out his heart unto God. There is a time for quiet contemplative prayer. We've been seeing that throughout the Psalms. But here is a different tone. This was not that time. Psalmist simply cries out, "Hear me and save me." You see those words? Hear me and save me.

You see the heart is the core center of your thoughts, your desires, what forms you as a character in Christ and also your will. It is not just your emotions. God loves to respond as we know from Psalm 51:17. He responds to a broken spirit and a contrite heart. One who has been humble because of one's sins and he despises God despises a divided heart and we see that he also loathes as it says in James 1:8 a double-minded man a man that cannot make a decision just continues on back and forth doubting, doubting, doubting, doubting says he's not going to give anything to that person. You

see, God hates a hypocritical and a split allegiance towards him.

Thomas Manton strongly emphasized the necessity of secret closed or rather closet prayer as the Lord Jesus taught regarding authentic communion with God the father and the text in Matthew 6 to go into in secret into the closet. You see Thomas Manton argued that God's command to pray applies to individuals first and then extending to the families if you have a family and then extends out to the corporate church body. Notice the concentric circle starting with yourself, your own devotional time with the Lord. Then you can pray for your family. Then you can pray for your church body because God is a God of order. And so the Lord Jesus says when you pray, you pray alone. Isn't that was Christ's example when he was here on earth? He stepped away. He withdrew himself to pray what? With his disciples? No, alone. He prayed alone. He set the example for us.

He goes on, Thomas Manton writes that God neither loves halting meaning wavering nor having double-minded. He will be served truly and totally as the royal law is, thou shalt love and serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul. Prayer without the heart is but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Prayer is only lovely and weighty as the heart is in it, and no otherwise. It is not lifting up of the voice, nor of the wringing of the hands, nor the beating of the breast, nor an affected tone changing the volume or the tone of your language, nor studied emotions, not flailing your arms, nor seraphical expressions, angelic faces, those are all external. But the stirring of the heart that God looks upon in prayer is this. He hears no more than the heart speaks. I love what he says there. He hears no more than the heart speaks. If the heart be dumb, God will certainly be deaf. No prayer takes with God but that which is the travail of the heart. End quote.

The psalmist prays, "Save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies." This is a man who already belonged to God regarding his sins. They are already been forgiven. Yet, he needed salvation from temporal afflictions and temporal troubles in his life. But it gives us a father to run to. He gives us an opportunity to run to his arms.

As Matthew Henry noted, we must pray for salvation, not merely so we can enjoy ease and comfort, but so that we may have the opportunity to serve God more cheerfully. Remember back in the last message to delight in the Lord? That's what it means to delight more in the things when you're serving the Lord Jesus Christ. And praise God, many of you are responding in that way. You see, God permits trials then beyond our control. Note, note that when he

sends a trial, it's to be beyond your control. To strip away all of our self-reliance until we realize the truth of Jesus' words in John 15:5, "For without me ye can do nothing."

See, praying with a divided heart is like trying to have a conversation with someone who is constantly scrolling on their smartphone while they're absent-mindedly saying, "Yes, I understand. I'm listening. I'm listening." Wholehearted prayer drops every distraction. Doesn't care about those things when it's time for prayer, but looks upward to our heavenly father and pours the hand out of the soul with complete vulnerability. Do you do that? Are you completely vulnerable when you're praying to God? Are you giving him of all your thoughts, your desires, your will to him? Because when difficulty strikes, wholehearted prayer that cries out to God the Father, asking not just for temporary relief, but for divine strength to then obey his word and then glorify him in the trial. To glorify him in the trial. That's what he wants. He doesn't want us to be left on our own.

So then, while we looked at verses 145 to 146, which teaches us how to pray with the whole heart, verse 147 to 148 teaches us when to pray. Look down with me to verse 147, 148. He says, "I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word. Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word." The word prevent means to go before to anticipate or to precede. The psalmist got out of bed before the sun came up to what? To cry out to God. The father in putting all his hope in him. That means his truth, his promises, his commands. When you're reading the text, is that what you're hoping in? Or is it something else that you're hoping in this temporal world? You see, it's a posture of waking up in the morning and looking forward to the day in hoping in the word. That's the posture.

And then his actions declared that he needed his presence in feeding his soul with hope-filled words more than he needed sleep. And when evening came, his eyes stayed open through the night watches so he could meditate on God's promises. How does that look? In the evening, reflect. Meditate back on the day on God's character, on his works, and his word. What a wonderful way to live.

Apostle Paul commands us 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to pray without ceasing. This doesn't mean unceasing prayer on your knees 24 hours a day or muttering words non-stop throughout the day. No, Apostle Paul here was speaking of an underlying attitude and disposition of the heart. So, he was tying very closely to what we are reading here in the text this evening. It's about the heart. It's

about the heart and everything else.

Now, Thomas Manton has been very helpful in this sermon and I'm going to share multitudes of quotes from him because he has helped me a lot in my own prayer life and I want this to be an encouragement to you in your prayer life. So, here's another thing he notes on this passage on these passages. Those who make a business of prayer will use great vigilance and diligence therein. It's not enough just to pray, but to watch and pray as Jesus taught us and taught us to pray. See, formality treats prayer as just something additional to reading God's word. No, they are just as important together. Or if you think of it as a necessary duty, you will not be affected in the heart. But the true believer, one whose heart is in the prayer, breaks his sleep because communion with God is more vital to him than physical rest. His desires will not let him sleep.

There have been many times I'll wake up 3:00 in the morning or 4 in the morning and I can't go back to sleep unless I'm praying. Those moments are God's love for you. It is his love for you who doesn't want you to rush in through the day without him and his presence. Do you acknowledge that in your times of prayer when he wakes you up and you or do you just nod back to sleep when that can be the most wonderful time you can commune with God the father? Better to rest in him than physical rest. Amen.

So Manton also highlights how scriptural figures reiterated their petitions. You might be praying it in the morning and that same prayer might go into the afternoon and go into the evening. Have you ever prayed a prayer that's just ongoing? Here are some individuals or just two. This Paul, look at Paul. Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:8, he says that the thorn in the flesh might depart from him. He repeated it three times. You see, he was desiring for this hardship or this ongoing trial to be removed. He didn't just pray it once. He prayed it three times. It's not the numbers to just focus on, but his heart in it.

Now, the Lord Jesus in Gethsemane in Matthew 26:44, he left the three disciples and went away again. And in the text says he prayed a third time. And he prayed a third time saying the same words. He said this, "O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as you will." Think about that. The Lord Jesus Christ, his whole heart again. He is our example. The Apostle Paul saw that. May we see that. Let's pray until our whole hearts are given over to God the Father.

Warren Wiersbe wisely stated, "All Bible and no prayer means light without heat, but all prayer and no Bible could result in zeal without knowledge." We need both. We need zeal. We need light. We need both in a world saturated with so much digital notifications and emails and all the constant noise that coming our way. We today in our generation have minds that are perpetually fragmented. It is very easy to then have a divided heart and a double mind. Do you realize that?

Think about the time I can remember the time without a phone and I can have a thought carry me throughout the whole day. How much has that thought now been fragmented due to all the things around us? And I put this in my time of prayer. Father, when I pray, I pray that I will hear your words above all the noise. Above all the noise. You are the most important of my time, of my energy, of my focus, of my all. You got to do that in the pre-dawn of the day. You've got to do that late in the midnight hour when the noise is less and then you can hear God's voice more clearly and you can commune with God undistracted. It's a wonderful thing to live this way. We want to trade the fleeting alerts of this world for this. The eternal voice of God the Father. That's what we want, don't we? That's what we want. That's what unceasing prayer looks like. It is a battle. It is a battle of your flesh, which wants to sleep, which wants to get distracted, which wants comfort and ease. Know that, recognize that, go in with that, and say, "God, help me on all these areas that I'm weak. I am totally dependent upon you to find true comfort, true security, true everything."

Think of it. Unceasing prayer is like not turning a car on and off. It's more like nowadays people don't turn on the radio, but I can still go back. Remember those the radio dial and you change the channel and it's constantly on. The frequency is always on. And that's more how it is to be continuously tuned to the heavenly father. Whether driving or working or resting, your heart can commune and stay tuned to God's word and communion with him in prayer. It is a profound thing to know what it means to be praying with unceasing prayer.

Think of it. You can bookend your time of the day in prayer first thing in the morning before sun rises before the day demands your energy. Not saying those things are bad time with family, time with your church family, those good things, but they are taking your energy. It's reserving our best to God. And you're last thing at night before your eyes get heavy and sleep conquers your body. This is when verse 147 and verse 148 is for us to remember that it's morning and evening time that is crucial to be in communion with God the

Father.

Then we go on and look at verse 149. He says, "Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness: O Lord, quicken me according to thy judgment." Here we see where his prayers are grounded in God's character, in his justice. Let's break up those two things. Let's look at God's love. The word here appears again, the word *chesed*, his lovingkindness. It means his covenantal love. Meaning that he'll never break this love with us. He will always love us. His love never changes. He never fails us. His covenant keeping love. So the psalmist approaches God in this way as a hurting child crying out to a loving father. Just picture for a moment. I know this as a father. If my child came in and she was really hurting and she was just trying to focus in how to say something, I would think it's foolish. And that's why he cries. He hears the cries. He hears the cries. He knows what's behind the groanings. A loving father such as God the Father, he knows what's behind that pain and he asked God then to quicken me. Quicken me. As you recall, this means reviving.

Thomas Manton explains there is what's called an external revival and an internal revival. External revival is when someone goes through suffering, a calamity or depression, discouragement, and they feel dead and buried under the weight of their troubles. And at times God will restore joy and your well-being. That is external revival as he mentions. Then he calls another type internal revival. That's the spiritual renewal. Rather than changing outward circumstances, this quickening happens deep inside your soul. It looks like spiritual stagnation. Seems like nothing you do is growing in your grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ or knowledge of God's will. You're spiritually exhausted. It seems doesn't matter how much sleep you get. It doesn't matter how much vacation you take, your soul is exhausted. Or you can be slumbering in your life just coasting along just putting a half-hearted effort in serving the Lord. It is a prayer to then God the father to take the habits of grace. This is the word that he uses habits of grace. It's the quiet existing faith and virtues already inside of a believer, a Christian, and turns them into acts. Vibrant active expression of one's faith, active obedience to God's unfailing word and a love that's renewed and revived. That is what internal revival looks like. And we see this in the books of Acts, don't we? God's grace acted out.

Manton then shows that quickening can mean either outward deliverance from heavy troubles, restoring joy to life, or inward spiritual re-energizing through the spirit of God, restoring strength unto faith in the Lord. And you

will see that many of Manton's writings, he notes that God often does both for the believer.

Now notice he doesn't just only appeal to God's covenantal love, but he also appeals to then God's judgment. You see this in the text. Both are necessary. He asks God to quicken him in loving kindness, but also in judgment according to his judgment. This is referring to God's righteous law and ordinances. Most people are afraid to ask for anything based on justice because his justice is perfect. You prefer to strictly ask for his mercy. But the psalmist understood that God's justice works for his covenantal people just as much as his mercy does because God always acts in perfect alignment to his written word. Always. And so this is then our prayers must be based then not on the fluctuating feelings, our emotions, but basing your assurance on God's unchanging character, his love, and his perfect justice of his word. Many times people get stuck just praying for his love but never asking to show your judgments. We need both. We need both. This is how we must appeal to God to really get assurance in answered prayers.

Now let's look on to verses 150 to 151. We note here a dramatic contrast. He says, "They draw nigh that follow after mischief: they are far from thy law." Then he goes on, "Thou art near, O Lord; and all thy commandments are truth." Here we're seeing as patterns of the psalmist. In the end, he would talk about the enemies. Here he focuses on the enemy closing in evil men who devise wicked schemes and persecute the psalmist as like a hunter surrounded by prey. And they act this way because notice in the text they are far from thy law. They are far from thy law. See, proximity to God is measured by devotion, obedience, not a geographical location.

You see, a person can be physically close to truth, yet living far from God's word. Remember the scribe in Mark 12:34 to whom Jesus said, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." He was noting that he was close in knowledge yet far away to perish if he did not return repent and trust in him.

And then verse 151 delivers again that contrast as they are far from thy law. He says, "Thou art near, O Lord." Thou art near. The enemy may draw near to destroy, but the Lord is already near. For who? Us believers in Christ. To supply us, to protect us, and to deliver us. It's like Psalm 23:4. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me." And then Psalm 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

Is that how you pray? It doesn't matter how much the enemy is attacking, they're not as close as the Lord. Remember I said about this morning, where's the gap with you and God? Is there fear of man there? Is there your will in there, your desires there? Or is it wholly set on God who is your refuge and strength? A very present help in trouble. Whenever you feel surrounded by conflict or trouble or pressure, immediately remember the enemy may be near, but my Lord is nearer. He is always nearer.

Then we close the stanza in verse 152 with a settled testimony. He says, "Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever." God's word is immutable, never changes. He is eternal. And the Lord has laid then an everlasting foundation for his word and it will stand forever. As Psalm 119:89 says, "For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." Isaiah 40:8, "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." And then the Lord Jesus Christ, Mark 13:31, "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away." Psalmist speaks from personal battle tested experiences with God's word. He says, "I have known of old." I love that expression. I have known of old. He did not just discover God's truth just one day or the day before. He had tested God's word in past storms. And past conflicts and past troubles. And God's word stood firm every single time. Every single time because he knew God's character immutable. He did not panic in his present crisis. He remembered how the word had proven true in the past and he knew would prove true in his present trouble and whatever tomorrow might then bring.

See, when you build your prayer life on what you have known of old, and you can only have that with your deeper awareness of God's presence, deeper understanding of God's word and reflection upon it that can help you to stand true in all of your life because he has proven himself in history, not only in your life, but in the life of like the psalmist, of like the Apostle Paul, of like the Apostle Peter, and so on and so on through the ages. We have men and women who knew how to pray according to God's loving kindness and his justice.

Our true nearness then is in Christ. And the only way we can have then communion with God is because of Christ. You see question asked is how can we as sinful human beings dare to approach a holy God with such bold assurance? How can we be certain that when trouble draws near, God is near to save us rather than judge us? Again, the answer is found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the cross of Calvary, Jesus endured the ultimate terror of God, drawing far away where the Lord Jesus Christ himself cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Jesus was forsaken so that you and I might never be forsaken. He took the distance our sins deserved so that we could be brought near to God. As one commentator puts it, God's testimonies are founded forever on the immovable foundation of the blood of the eternal covenant of Christ. Isn't that wonderful?

But by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, that eternal covenant is forever settled in Christ. Because Christ rose victorious over sin and death. He does not merely stand near us. No, by the Holy Spirit, he dwells within us. There is no religion, as one person said, where your God dwells in a person. Think about that. The Holy Spirit lives within us, dwells within us, quickening our dead hearts to pray then with wholehearted prayer. That's the Spirit of God that opens the heart. And this covenantal love and God's perfect justice, the Holy Spirit will show you where you have gone astray.

Dear Christian, when you're going astray, it is the Holy Spirit that draws you back. Wandering from the truth and neglected wholehearted prayer. Will you pray then that he will revive you again? He can. He will because his truth never fails. His character is the same and his promises and his commandments are forever settled in heaven.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Oh father, it is a privilege again to just come to you not by our own merits but the merits of thy son's blood has made that eternal covenant possible with you father so that we can cry Abba, Father that we can cry and you will understand our cry father there are people in this room I can imagine of going being pulled and distracted by this world just as I am, Lord. But I've seen you come through time and time again where you revived once again what was made alive. And so, Father, I do ask and pray for a spiritual revival in our church. Father, prepare the men tonight that when we come here back on Friday evening at 11, we pray till 6:00 in the morning. Father, prepare us to pray for revival. For our own hearts to be revived and for our brothers and sisters to also be revived. Also help us to pray for not small things. Oh Lord, help us to pray big things, great things because you are a great and almighty God. Father, help us Lord. Open up our hearts. Remove any dross that remains and may we be of fragrant that is sweet smelling to you in our prayer. Father, may we be prayer warriors, Father. Father, that we will be men and women of prayer that would pray until answer comes not according

to our will but according to thy will as the Lord Jesus showed us so perfectly. We want to be more conformed to the image of Christ and holiness. Father, make your church pure as it's supposed to be. May our church never be prostituted into this world's way of seeker friendly type church. May we be a church that is founded on Christ alone where he is the great shepherd and I am just an undershepherd and these people are your people not mine. Father, help us to have more of a surrendered heart to your will and that we would delight more in following after your will, after the knowledge of your will. Father, please bless our church in this way. And we'll thank you in Jesus' precious name. Amen.