

Reviving Your Prayer Life In God's Word (Ps 119:145-152)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on March 15, 2009

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Psalm 119:145-152 (NKJV) ¹⁴⁵ I cry out with *my* whole heart; Hear me, O LORD! I will keep Your statutes. ¹⁴⁶ I cry out to You; Save me, and I will keep Your testimonies. ¹⁴⁷ I rise before the dawning of **the morning**, And cry for help; I hope in Your word. ¹⁴⁸ My eyes are awake through the *night* watches, That I may **meditate** on Your word. ¹⁴⁹ **Hear my voice** according to Your lovingkindness; O LORD, **revive me** according to Your justice. ¹⁵⁰ They draw near who follow after wickedness; They are far from Your law. ¹⁵¹ You *are* near, O LORD, And all Your commandments *are* truth. ¹⁵² Concerning Your testimonies, I have known of old that You have founded them forever.

If your prayer life has lost life and needs reviving spiritually (as mine sadly often does), this passage was inspired in part with people like you and me in mind. The 2nd half of verse 149 has the prayer “revive me,” a prayer we see 11x in this psalm, including 3x more in next week’s text.

For our outline, there are 4 patterns of prayer for us to emulate to revive our prayer lives:

1. Pray Earnestly (v. 145-146)
2. Pray Constantly (v. 147-148)
3. Pray Biblically (v. 149-150)
4. Pray Trustingly (v. 151-152)

1. Pray Earnestly (v. 145-146)

We see here the importance of being earnest in prayer. As the passage begins, this is no mere duty or formality; there is a desperate urgency in the phrases of these earnest pleas:

v. 145 “I cry out with my whole heart, Hear me, O Lord!”

v. 146 “I cry out to you, save me” (v. 147 adds “I cry for help”)

One of the ways to revive and breathe life into your prayer life is to recognize your desperate need for God’s help. I need Thee every hour. If you do not have the same heart cry as this text, all the more reason to earnestly *pray for earnestness itself* in your heart. As you read Scripture, if your heart falls short of what you read, pray and plead with God to make that the cry of your heart, too!

Colossians 4:12-13 (NASB95) ¹² Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, **always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers** ... I testify for him that he has a **deep concern** for you

Epaphras is not one of the more famous names in the Bible or faith heroes we think of emulating, but I can’t think of a greater tribute and benediction than for a faithful saint behind the scenes earnestly praying for his brothers and sisters in the Lord. Many of the most spiritual men and women of any time are not the ones on stage but the ones in their prayer closet who faithfully fervently earnestly pray. Other translations have “fervently” laboring in prayer, even “wrestling ... struggling on behalf of you ... he worked hard”

Verse 145 here begins “I cried” or “I cry out.” Calvin’s comments inform us that the Hebrew ‘verb *cry* always conveys the idea of earnestness; referring, as it does, not so much to the loudness of the voice as to the vehemency’¹ – more than its volume, in other words, there was a fervency, an intensity; he prayed passionately!

This is clear in the next phrase “with all my heart / my whole heart.” His prayers were not half-hearted but were wholehearted cries calling out as if in pain and need, which is better prayer than the most eloquent words of a Pharisee to be heard by men as they pray loudly and multiply words that impress everyone except God.

In *Mr. John Bunyan’s Dying Sayings*, he says in prayer, it’s better to have heart “without words than ... words without a heart.”²

It is the heart that God always looks to, even though man looks at the outward appearance. That is an OT principle the Pharisees missed in their lip service without heart service. Matthew Henry said it in his concise way, “lip labour, if that be all, is lost labour.”

In v. 145 “Hear me, O LORD” is translated by most of the other versions with “Answer me,” which also accurately conveys the sense of the Hebrew idea: “hear in the sense of answer, respond.” God hears everything, of course, but this is a prayer that God would listen and look upon such heart prayers and answer kindly.

Psalm 66:16-20 (NASB95) ¹⁶ Come *and hear*, all who fear God, And I will tell of what He has done for my soul ... ¹⁸ If I regard wickedness in my heart, **The Lord will not hear;** ¹⁹ But certainly **God has heard; He has given heed to the voice of my prayer.** ²⁰ Blessed be God, **Who has not turned away my prayer**

Proverbs 28:9 (NASB95) He who **turns away his ear from listening to the law**, Even his prayer is an abomination.

If we do not listen and respond to God has to say to us, God will not listen and respond to what we have to say to him. It is only those who hear God (Ps 66:16) that God will hear (v. 18-19), not those whose ears take in the Word while their hearts cherish sin.

In Psalm 5 we have the prayers we sang earlier “Give ear to my words ... consider ... hearken unto the voice of my cry,” and as he prays that way he expresses his confidence: “my voice shalt thou hear in the morning.” God hears everything, but the psalm there speaks of an early earnest cry for help in faith that he is confident God will give ear to (attention to), will consider (look on), will hearken to (heed), and will *hear* in the biblical sense of responding or answering, not just receiving with the auditory ear-drums.

¹⁴⁶ I cried to You; save me And I shall keep Your testimonies.

Notice the verse says “I cried *to You*” – he wasn’t crying to others about this. His first thought in difficulty was not to call up a friend and cry on *his shoulder* and find sympathy and a pity party from a human support group or a human solution. He says to God “I cried *to You*.” It is to God first and foremost that he cries out and looks to for support and for help, the One who actually has the power and ability to do something about our problems. The Lord has true sympathy for our weaknesses as our High Priest who on earth was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. Jesus was known as a friend to sinners who are repentant, and He is *the Friend* we should turn to first and fully and frequently and fervently.

Notice in both v. 145 and 146, he is earnest not merely for God's help but his earnest heart's prayer is for help *so he can obey the Word of God*. He prays with desperation for the sake of dedication.

v. 145b "Hear me, O LORD! **I will keep** your statutes"

v. 146b "Save me **and I will keep** your testimonies"

This prayer is not motivated by a *desire for ease or comfort*; it's motivated by a *determination with eagerness and commitment* to obey God more and more. The grammar of this phrase connects his obedience as the purpose or result of the prayer "save me."³

Look again at verse 146: he says "I cried to *You*, save me," which is fitting emphasis on "You" because God is the only one who can save or deliver us from our troubles. Often the way God does so is by saving us *through* our troubles, giving us the grace to go through and be safe and secure from all alarm with God's presence

Notice again that he prays "Save me, *so that I shall keep Your Word*." He is not praying "save me, so I can keep doing my own thing," which is the unfortunate way some understand the gospel today and even the way some *present* the gospel.

- Many emphasize the love of Jesus but leave out His Lordship and calls to repent and diminish it to minimal mental acknowledgement of facts and "invite Him to be a part of your life"
- But the biblical call to believe in the Lord Jesus is not a mere mental trust in Him for eternity, while desiring to live your own life now, enjoy sin, and get salvation in next life
- If you believe in Jesus you also believe what He said, that to come after Him you must determine to turn from your sin, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him. It's not that you do all those things *before* you believe, it's that a true follower of Jesus wants to follow what Jesus said
- It's the end of your ways, and the start of a life pursuing the ways of our ... *Lord*, which is another word for ... *Master*
- The gospel isn't fire insurance so you can keep living in, playing with the fire of sin while disregarding all warnings and cautions. We're saved *to serve the Savior*, not our sin
- The believer prays like this verse "save me (*from sin, not to sin*) and I will keep Your word." We don't keep God's Word to earn God's salvation, salvation comes first, but when grace transforms us our heart we now desire to obey
- Even the word order of this verse is important: "Save me *and [then]* I will keep or obey" – it is only by God's grace that we can obey. But if your lifestyle is not obedience by grace, many of the Bible writers challenge you to examine yourself to see if you *have* God's grace. If you do not have a heart desiring to keep God's Word, examine yourself: have you ever truly received God's life-changing gospel?

We are not only dependent on God's grace in initial salvation, His grace to be regenerated, and to believe as a result of God's prior work in us – we are also dependent for God's grace to keep us saved and to continually deliver us from evil, as Jesus taught His disciples to pray. The prayer in *this verse* "save me" is not here an unbeliever crying for initial deliverance, but a believer crying for God ongoing deliverance. This Hebrew word "save" can include physical deliverance, or preservation through difficult or desperate circumstances. Here it may be a prayer for God to save his life from death so he can continue to serve and obey the Lord longer.

Peter walked on water but took eyes off Jesus and began to sink, he cried out to the Lord the exact same words: “Save me!” (Mt 14:30). It was not a long or eloquent or flowery prayer, but it was a fervent prayer, and a prayer Jesus always answers when it’s sincere and earnest. May God help us to see our own desperate need and to pray more earnestly, so that our prayers can be more effective.

James 5:16-18 (NKJV) ¹⁶... **The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.** ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and **he prayed earnestly** that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. ¹⁸ And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain ...

Elijah on another occasion prayed down fire from heaven, and we need to pray earnestly like him that God may bring down fire again spiritually to set our lives ablaze with God’s truth and set us on fire for the Lord. Like Elijah did on Mount Carmel, we can put wood on the altar spiritually speaking by the Word and spiritual disciplines, but we need earnest prayer for fire from heaven to enflame our souls, as we offer ourselves as living sacrifices. May God kindle our hearts!

2. Pray Constantly (v. 147-148)

I rise before the dawning of the morning, And cry for help; I hope in Your word. My eyes are awake through the night watches [*NASB “I wait for your words. My eyes anticipate the night watches”*], That I may meditate on Your word

Notice the words “morning” and “evening.” We sang earlier Psalm 5 that says “my voice shalt thou hear in the morning,” and we see in other psalms encouragement to start days in prayer:

Psalm 88:13 “... in the morning my prayer comes before You.”

Psalm 130:6 “My soul *waits* for the Lord More than the watchmen for the morning; *Indeed, more than* the watchmen for the morning.”

The language of watchmen, or in v. 147, the “night watches,” refers to how the Jews divided up the evenings into watches or periods, originally from sunset to 10 p.m., then another watch from 10-2:00 *a.m.*, and a third watch till sunrise. If you were a watchmen or soldier, those would correspond to the night shifts. If this is David writing Psalm 119, perhaps as there was the changing of the guard in the middle of the night at his palace that he might hear and awaken, he looked forward to the opportunity to meditate on God’s Word (*how God talks to us*) and he looked forward to scheduled or spontaneous prayer times (*how we talk to God*). It seems he planned times with God but there were also times when he would providentially awake or couldn’t sleep, and instead of counting sheep he would call on the Shepherd who helps him lie down in peaceful pastures with Scriptural still waters.

This writer’s life was not compartmentalized to a “time with God” and then time for everything else. Every part of life, day or night, he was God-centered, God-oriented, and God-worshipping:

v. 62 “*At midnight I will rise to give thanks to you*”

v. 164 “*Seven times a day I praise you*” (7=completely, constantly)

In vs. 147-148, when you see the word “morning” followed by “night” for his meditation, the idea is like Ps 1:2 (“on His law he meditates *day and night*”) or Joshua 1:8 (“meditate on it day and night”) – i.e., constantly, “morning, noon, and night,” 24/7, “all-day every day,” constant continual prayer and meditation. As David says in Ps 139 “when I awake, you are still with me.”

His communion with the Lord was such that it was the natural nonstop nocturnal awareness when he would awake even briefly, when he would stir and roll over in his bed, his mind would roll over the thoughts of God's truth and the truth that God was with him.

When Elijah was on Mount Carmel he pointed out that this is what made the LORD God unique and true – we pray to Him at any time of any day or night and He hears us, because He who guards Israel though all the night-watches never slumbers nor sleeps. But as the prophets of Baal prayed to their false god with no response, Elijah mocks them “maybe Baal’s asleep, or tired ... cry a little louder!”

What folly or foolishness to trust in anything or anyone besides the true LORD God! On the other hand, if we truly believe in this God what a privilege and motivation to pray at all times to Him!!

In v. 147 he prays and in v. 148b he meditates on Scripture, which suggests there’s a 2-part 2-way communication involved in our duty to pray constantly, or as Paul said “pray without ceasing.”

We memorize Scripture, not only to help keep our way from sin (Ps 119:11), but also to fuel meditation and prayer, so we can be in constant communication with God, including letting Him speak to us throughout the day through His Word informing our thinking and worldview about everything in life as we meditate on Scripture

Colossians 3:16-17 (NASB95) ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ **richly dwell within you** ... [and the results include] **singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.** ¹⁷ **Whatever you do** in word or deed, *do all in the name of* the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks through Him** to God the Father.

Everything we do or say should be permeated with thankfulness to God and done in the name of and for the glory of Jesus. To “pray without ceasing” is not just the times of audibly talking to God with our eyes closed -- it’s the constant communion with God with our eyes open the rest of day, too, practicing the presence of God.

Watson describes it this way: ‘If we hear of something bad happening, we pray for God to act in the situation for His glory and people’s good. If we hear of something good, we respond with immediate praise to God, for He has been glorified. *In short, we view everything that comes from a spiritual perspective.* When Paul looked around his world, everything he saw prompted him to prayer in some way. When he thought of or heard about one of his beloved churches, it moved him to prayer [2 Timothy 1:3 “without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day”] Are we getting the picture? No intermission in our prayer. Our lives are permeated by a spiritual perspective. Nehemiah provides a wonderful example of such praying without ceasing ... The king asked Nehemiah to make a request of him that he might grant it. Before replying that the King send him to Judah, Nehemiah prayed a quick, brief prayer (Neh. 2:4) [not out loud with eyes closed, but in his heart there was constant prayer posture]. In the midst of a stressful situation, Nehemiah was conscious of God’s purpose.’⁴

Look at Psalm 119:148. His eyes were open like a watchman for the night watches, and in v. 150 he speaks of his enemies who were near that he had to keep on eye on. This passage has military mentality, a soldier's state of mind, a wartime way of thinking.

We pray without ceasing more when we recognize spiritual warfare more (Eph. 6).

It's been pointed out: 'The familiar phrase "watch and pray" goes back to when Nehemiah was leading the people in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and restoring the gates. The enemy did not want the holy city to be rebuilt, so they used fear, deceit, and every kind of ruse to hinder the work. What was Nehemiah's defense? "Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them [the enemy] we set a watch against them day and night" (Neh. 4:9, NKJV). Jesus (Matt. 26:41; Mark 13:33), Paul (Col. 4:2), and Peter (1 Peter 4:7) commanded God's people to "watch and pray," to be on guard and pray with intelligence and alertness. We are soldiers in a battle and we dare not go to sleep while on duty.'⁵

Lamentations 2:19 **"Arise, cry aloud in the night At the beginning of the night watches; Pour out your heart like water Before the presence of the Lord; Lift up your hands to Him For the life of your little ones ..."**

3. Pray Biblically (v. 149-150)

¹⁴⁹ Hear my voice according to Your lovingkindness; Revive me, O LORD, according to Your ordinances.

Notice this prayer for revival is "according to Your ordinances," a synonym for biblical truth, especially its judgments. This word has been explained as emphasizing God's 'binding judicial decisions that establish a precedent and binding law ... in effect, "God, I want you to hear me based upon your truth, your decisions, your will." [He] does not "Give me what I want ..." rather give me what meets your will ... *our will conforms to God's will*. There is the serious error today about prayer that says we can ask anything regardless of God's will [and Word]. There are even those who say we can "demand things from God" and that there are things God "must" do. Today's "healing movement," for example, says we can demand good health when we are Spirit filled. The "prosperity movement" says we can demand financial prosperity when we are good stewards of our money and ask God for more [like a genie?!]. Others just say that God will give us anything we want and even define prayer as "asking and receiving." How shameless all that is! In such schemes, God is lowered to the position of a butler who comes to serve us when ring a bell. God has now become the servant instead of us.'⁶ That is irreverent blasphemy, friends!

Biblical prayer is not twisting God's arm to get what we want, prayer is the turning of our will to submit to what GOD wants and will do. Twice in this verse he says "according to," and he doesn't say "according to my character or my desires," but according to God's; a prayer not based on his own merit, but on God's mercy.

Prayer is not a means for man to get his will done in heaven as man wants it on earth, for the sake of man's comfort and kingdom. Jesus taught us to pray "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Even Jesus prayed in the garden, "not my will, but Thine" -- how arrogant if that's not how *we* mortals pray? Praying biblically is so important because it is only in God's Word that we can know God's will, and it is prayer in accord with God's will that God answers and always answers in His perfect will.

1 Jn 5:14-15 “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked

John 15:7 (NASB95) ⁷ “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

Balancing the Word and prayer is crucial also because all Bible and little or no prayer can result in light without heat, but all prayer and little to no Bible could result in zeal without knowledge. Both extremes are seen in modern churches and individual Christians.

The early church in Acts, however, did not have such a dichotomy.

Acts 2:42 “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ **teaching** and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread **and to prayer.**”

Acts 6:4 “we will devote ourselves **to prayer and to the ministry of the word**”

We need both instruction and intercession to be balanced believers

¹⁵⁰ Those who follow after wickedness draw near; They are far from Your law.

“Draw near” and “far from” remind of the imbalanced Pharisees who “draw near with their lips while their heart is far from God.”

4. Pray Trustingly (v. 151-152)

¹⁵¹ You are near, O LORD, And all Your commandments are truth.

¹⁵² Of old I have known from Your testimonies That You have founded them forever.

Did you notice the movement from verse 150-151? He said the wicked “draw near,” but then v. 151 says “You are near, O Lord.” Those who are far from God’s law come near to him, but the Law-giving God is already near him – God was there first! God is never far away from those who love His law and believe His Word is truth, as v. 151 says. The *New Bible Commentary* sums it up well:

“The nearer life’s threats the nearer the Lord. *Near* (151) is a ‘next-of-kin’ word [Heb. for *kinsman* in book of Ruth]. The Lord has pledged himself to be our nearest relative who, in our helplessness, takes all our needs as his own ... thus ... our assurance that he is our next-of-kin rests on his unchanging testimony (*statutes*) to what he is and does.”⁷

This is the blessed assurance of believers, that the Lord is near, no matter how near our enemies and trials are, God will never leave us nor forsake us. The second half of the verse bolsters this confidence in affirming everything God says is truth, which gives us great comfort and confidence in a reliable and faithful God if we call upon Him in truth, He will be near as He promises.

Psalm 145:18-19 (NASB95) ¹⁸ The **LORD is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth.** ¹⁹ He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; **He will also hear their cry and will save them.**

Deuteronomy 4:7 (NASB95) “For what great nation is there that has a **god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him?**”

James 4 (NASB95) ⁷ Submit therefore to God ... ⁸ **Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.** Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded ... ¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord

In Psalm 119, wicked sinners who haven't repented or submitted to God or changed their ways or humbled themselves, these ones in v. 150 "draw near," but the believer prays trustingly in v. 151 that God is more near. As Derek Kidner puts it, "The threat is not glossed over; it is put in perspective by a bigger fact."⁸ This man of God had a very big God, and the bigger your God, the smaller your problems and people will be in comparison. There's an excellent book I recommend highly on the fear of man and people-pleasing, entitled "When people are big and God is small." This psalmist had a very BIG God, so all people and problems were so much smaller.

Philippians 4:5b "... **The Lord is near.** ⁶ **Be anxious for nothing**, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus ...

⁹ The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, **practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you ...**

¹¹ ... I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am ...

¹³ I can do all things through Him who strengthens me ...

¹⁹ And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

If you truly believe the Lord is near (v. 5) then you can truly rejoice in the Lord always (v. 4), and pray without ceasing instead of being anxious and worried without ceasing (v. 6). When you pray trusting in God and His truth, this last point, the blessings are:

- the mind-surpassing peace of God (v. 7)
- the God of peace Himself being with us and near us (v. 9), as we put His Word into practice.
- contentment no matter what our circumstances are (v. 11)
- the near and present Lord's strength to do all things (v. 13)
- the near and present provision of the Lord, not necessarily material riches, but all our needs according to His riches spiritually in Christ Jesus (v. 19), which is far better!

MacArthur concludes: "When you have a thought, the Lord is near to read it; when you pray, the Lord is near to hear it; when you need His strength and power, He is near to provide it. In fact, He lives in you and is the source of your spiritual life. An awareness of His presence will keep you from being anxious or unstable.

Knowing the Lord is near helps us "be anxious for nothing" because we know He can handle everything we encounter. Fretting and worrying indicate a lack of trust in God. Either you've created another god who can't help you, or else you believe God could help you but refuses, which means you are questioning His integrity and Word. So delight in the Lord and meditate on His Word (Ps. 1:2). Know who He is and how He acts. Then you'll be able to say, "The Lord is near, so I'm not going to worry."⁹

If you truly believe God is near, it will affect how you pray and live. The last verse of our passage says God's Word is firmly founded forever, so we can trust Him forever, as not only near to help, but a God who is unchanging and always faithful. How firm a foundation we have as saints of the Lord laid down right here in God's excellent Word. May God revive our prayers and our faith in our big God, in our glorious God, in our very gracious God.

1 John Calvin. *Commentary on Psalms - Volume 5* (16).

2 *Works of John Bunyan*, Volume 1, "Dying Sayings."

3 *NET Bible Notes*: The cohortative verbal form with *vav* (ו) conjunctive indicates purpose/result after the preceding imperative.³

4 J. D. Watson. The Sufficiency of God's Word - An Exposition of Psalm 119.

<http://www.thescripturealone.com/PS119.html>

5 Warren Wiersbe, (2004). *Be exultant* (1st ed.) Colorado Springs, Colo.: Cook Communications Ministries, p. 137.

6 Watson, *Ibid*.

7 D. A. Carson. *New Bible commentary : 21st century edition*. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

8 Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, p. 428.

9 John MacArthur. *Truth for today : A daily touch of God's grace*. Nashville, Tenn.: J. Countryman, p. 343.