

## October 27, 2021 | Wednesday Night Live | Psalm 119: Learning the Letters of Scripture

Week 21 | Psalm 119:153-160 | Resh

Today, we move on to the twentieth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, Resh. <Insert Picture>

Two ideas tie this stanza loosely together. The first is that of the Psalmist requesting “life” (cf. vs. 154, 156, 159), and the other is that of someone “looking” at something (cf. vs. 153, 158, 159).<sup>1</sup> Curiously, when it comes to his plea for life, and because this chapter is quickly drawing to a close, could there be a mounting urgency in the psalm-singer’s voice?<sup>2</sup> Could he be in such dire straits that he thinks only through repeated inquiry will his request be answered (cf. Lu. 18:1-8)?<sup>3</sup>

**READ:** Psalm 119:153-160 (ESV)

### Resh

<sup>153</sup> Look on my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget your law.

<sup>154</sup> Plead my cause and redeem me; give me life according to your promise!

<sup>155</sup> Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek your statutes.

<sup>156</sup> Great is your mercy, O Lord; give me life according to your rules.

<sup>157</sup> Many are my persecutors and my adversaries, but I do not swerve from your testimonies.

<sup>158</sup> I look at the faithless with disgust, because they do not keep your commands.

<sup>159</sup> Consider how I love your precepts! Give me life according to your steadfast love.

<sup>160</sup> The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.

What are the principles that the Psalmist is trying to instill in this twentieth stanza?

Vs. 153      God’s “law” is ever-before the Psalmist. He obeys it. He memorizes it. He does not “forget” it. Therefore, our psalm-singer reasons, the Lord ought to

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<sup>1</sup> Wilcock, Michael, *The Message of Psalms 73-150*, The Bible Speaks Today, (Downers Grove, Ill; InterVarsity Press Academic, 2001), p. 216.

<sup>2</sup> Allen, Leslie C., *Psalm 101-150*, The World Biblical Commentary, Volume 21, (Nashville, TN; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), p. 191.

<sup>3</sup> Kidner, Derek, *Psalm 73-150*, The Kidner Classic Commentaries, (Downers Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity Press Academic, Reprint, 2008), p. 464.

see (“look”) how helpless (“my affliction”) he is and rescue (“deliver”) him. In this way, our wanderer assumes that obedience grants him some semblance of protection. All he wants is for God to pay attention to what is happening in his life. He wants to know that he is not being ignored.

- Vs. 154      In verse 41, it was according to God’s “promise” that “salvation” would come to the Psalmist. In verse 58, it was according to God’s “promise” that he would also receive grace. In verse 76, it was according to God’s “promise” that he would be comforted. In verse 116, it was according to God’s “promise” that our wanderer would be supported. In verse 133, it was according to God’s “promise” that his “steps” would be steadied. And now, here, in verse 154, “life” is being requested in accordance with God’s “promise” once again. As we mentioned before, this is the first of three such requests in this stanza alone. It seems, every which way he can, the Psalmist is pleading for things that are in accordance with God's word. In this case, he's specifically looking for a court advocate who will "plead" his case ("case") so that he might be saved ("redeem") from condemnation (cf. Rom. 8:31-39). After all, who better to defend you in a court of law than the Law-giver Himself?
- Vs. 155      As verse 151 clarifies, when the Psalmist draws near to God, God draws near to the Psalmist (cf. Ja. 4:8). But, sadly, the converse of that statement is also just as true: withdraw from God, and He will withdraw from you. This is why our wanderer makes it abundantly clear in verse 155 that “salvation” isn’t just down the road from the “wicked,” but it is “far” from those who stubbornly disobey. But why is deliverance so far away? Because sinners do not look for (“seek”) God’s “statues.” Indeed, as the writer of Proverbs put it, “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart.” (Pro. 21:2)
- Vs. 156      The Psalmist, for the second time, asks to be given “life.” But unlike verse 154, this time, he’s asking for life in accordance with God’s “rules.” This shows us that we not only have something to look forward to in the future (i.e., promise), but we also have guidelines to look to today (i.e., rules). Christianity isn’t a religion that only pays off in some far and away time, but it has big payoffs for those who live according to God’s word here and now. What’s more, unlike before, where our sojourner had repeated his request

multiple times throughout Psalm 119, this is the only time that this exact request is made. After all, who better to ask than One "great" with "mercy" like the Lord? Interestingly, the Hebrew term translated "mercy" is *rakh'-am*, and it has both a figurative and a literal usage. When used figuratively, as is clear from our verse, the term means something akin to compassion or benevolence. However, when *rakh'-am* is used in the literal sense, it means "womb" (cf. Gen. 49:25; Judg. 5:30; Pro. 30:16; Ez. 20:26). Thus, in this way, when we read the word "mercy" in our bibles, it is better understood as a "motherly compassion."<sup>4</sup> Meaning, you could actually say that God is pregnant with mercy for us. Just as a mother's womb surrounds, protects, and nourishes a growing baby, God encompasses, defends, and sustains us. In fact, even if we were to wander away from God, God would still yearn after us like those which have been "borne" of Him and "carried from" His "womb" (Isa. 46:3). This is not unlike how a mother will pine after a wayward son or daughter. Thus, a mother's love is really an echo of God's mercy. In the former, the Lord is glimpsed. But in the latter, a mother's love is finally understood.

Vs. 157 The Psalmist has spoken extensively about his "persecutors" and "adversaries," but this is the first time we get a clue to their number, and they appear to be "many." Interestingly, the Hebrew term *rav* ("many") is used to describe the untold number of false prophets on Mount Carmel (cf. 1 Ki. 18:25). And, as you'll remember in that famous story, Elijah—not unlike our wanderer—stood alone against his many adversaries when Jehovah was put to the test. Unsurprisingly, Baal was a no-show, whereas God showed up by way of a roaring flame from heaven which licked up water, sacrifice, and even the very stones of the altar. And like the Psalmist says here, Elijah, at that moment, did not "swerve" from God's "testimonies." In fact, his confidence in the Lord even led him to ridicule and mock the Baal-worshippers saying in 1 Kings 18:27, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." When a follower of God cares only for what God thinks of them, they are able to plant their feet in the face of a hostile rising tide without shrinking back.

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<sup>4</sup> General Editors, "Compassion," September 1, 2020, *The Bible Project*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJEtyAiAQik&t=5s>, [accessed, October 26, 2021].

- Vs. 158      Envy is a looking at what is not ours and desiring it to be ours. In this way, seeing something causes lust to arise in one's heart. Here, the Psalmist experiences the exact opposite response. Rather than lust, he feels an intense "disgust" for what he sees. As he "looks" at those who are utterly devoid of a belief in God ("faithless"), his stomach churns within, making him feel sick. Interestingly, *koot* ("disgust") is the same term God uses to describe how He felt about the generation of Israelites who wandered the desert for forty years (cf. Ps. 95:10). It is also the emotion that the Jews felt when they looked at themselves in the mirror during the great exile (cf. Ezek. 6:9; 20:43; 36:31). *Koot* is a sensation of intense loathing coupled with extreme grief. It is the kind of reaction that someone experiences when one hears of a gruesome act of violence or other atrocity. After all, those who "do not keep" God's "commands" are prone to engage in activities that are naturally abhorrent and nauseating to the enlightened mind. And when truth becomes whatever one wants it to be, then a person feels like they have a license to do whatever they want to do, even if the things they are doing are—by all objective standards—disgusting. Human imagination is second only to demonic inspiration when it comes to inventing dark and disturbing depravities. This is why Jeremiah the prophet once mused, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9 KJV) The Psalmist experienced elation when he looked to heaven but revulsion when he looked at the world.
- Vs. 159      This is now the third time, in this stanza alone, that the Psalmist has asked God to give him "life." But rather than asking God to revitalize him according to the Lord's "promises" (vs. 154) or "rules" (vs. 156), as he had before, our psalm-singer asks Jehovah to revive him in accordance the Creator's *khesēd* ("steadfast love"). This is now the seventh and last time the Psalmist will use this word in Psalm 119 (cf. vs. 41, 64, 76, 88, 124, 149). And, one would think, now that God's promises, rules, and loyal love have all been invoked, surely, our wanderer will get the life he so desperately needs. What's more, before, the Psalmist's pleas were for God to "look" on his "affliction" (vs. 153), but now he wants the Lord to look ("consider") on how much he "loves" God's "precepts." God not only sees how much trouble our wanderer has experienced in this life, but the Lord has also borne witness, with His own eyes, how obsessed the Psalmist is with the Scriptures. God

knows better than anyone that our wanderer is preoccupied with the Bible and has been persecuted because of it. What could possibly prevent Jehovah from acting on his behalf?

Vs. 160 If every word of Scripture was given a numeric value, the “sum” total of God’s “word” would equate to “truth.” This is not to say “sum” in the sense of “by and large,” as if there were a portion of God’s word that wasn’t true; but rather, it is to say “every part of” the Bible amounts to truth.<sup>5</sup> When put to the balancing scales, it alone outweighs all the feckless lies and frivolous rationale. The Bible is as impervious and incorruptible as any standard weight and measurement. Weigh it from year to year, and it will remain unchanged throughout all time. Or, as the Psalmist put it, every single “one” of God’s virtuous (“righteous”) “rules” is imperishable, indestructible, and inextinguishable. It is “forever.” It alone is the thing that remains (cf. vs. 140). And if God’s word is eternal, as God Himself is eternal, then those who follow God may find that they themselves last forever. Though troubles in life are plenty, there is implied permanence to those who do not stray from the Scriptures.<sup>6</sup>

"What's your takeaway?"

My takeaway this evening is this: God is merciful to me just as a mother is gracious with her child. In fact, the sheer boundlessness of a woman’s love for her offspring defies explanation. However, without a doubt, even a mother’s affection for her little boy or girl pales in comparison to love with which God loves us (cf. Mat. 7:11; Jn. 3:16). “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 Jn. 3:1)

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<sup>5</sup> Kidner (2008), p. 464.

<sup>6</sup> Allen (2002), p. 191.

## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

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TITLE: Resh

TEXT: Psalm 119:153-160

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: