

# THE VICTORY LIFE

in

## PSALM 119

by

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### CHAPTER FIVE

#### THE CRY OF DESPERATION

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**“Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end.  
Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea,  
I shall observe it with my whole heart.  
Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight.  
Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.  
Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.  
Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear.  
Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments are good.  
Behold, I have longed after thy precepts:  
Quicken me in thy righteousness” (Psalms 119:33-40).**

**“Make me to go” (v. 35**

WE WATCHED A PIGEON FANCIER on a certain occasion as he started some prize birds on a race. The cage was placed in a field and the door of escape was opened by the use of a long string. Rather deliberately the birds came out and flew to nearby objects such as a tree stump or fence post. They looked in one direction, then in another. Soon they took to their wings and moved somewhat in circles for the moment. It was evident they were seeking the right direction. Having been shipped by train a distance of one hundred miles, they had gone through mountain passes, around turns, and through tunnels. They were transported in railroad coach, station truck and auto. But, when they finally got their sense of direction, they were off.

The psalmist does not have too clearly the right sense of direction. He has meandered through many false ideas. Now he seems desperate. He is repetitious in his statements, uncertain in his thinking, and bewildered in his outlook. He reminds one of Job who seemed to be groping in darkness as the burden of his soul forced him to cry out,

**“Oh, that I knew where I might find him! that I might come' even to his seat!”** (Job 23:3).

But desperation never imitates. Its outbursts are never premeditated. They are like the release of a safety valve on a pressure tank — abruptly expulsive.

Desperation exceeds impatience in illogical outbursts. Impatience prompted James and John to call for fire from heaven to consume those who showed indifference toward Christ, but desperation led Isaiah to demand that God Himself come down and produce a terrifying phenomenon (Isaiah 64:1,2). Panic destroys reason.

**“Make me to go in the path of thy commandments”** (v. 35), the psalmist pleads.

As the hymn writer expressed it, our young friend had “tried in vain a thousand ways his fears to quell, his hopes to raise,” but he had failed. What he thought was so possible of attainment had somehow eluded his grasp. There was no lack of earnestness, but there was a pathetic lack of progress.

Surely his desire is real, but he is failing. His soul is still cleaving to the dust (v. 25). Now he seems to feel that, if he is going to make progress and know from experience the type of life enjoyed by the examples presented in verses 1 and 2, then God must seize him and force him to go in that hallowed way.

**“Make me to go!”** he appeals.

This is another common illusion which is altogether too general. God says, **“Come,”** but He does not force. He says, **“Go,”** but He does not thrust one forward. He could not make one to go in His designed course without forcing all since He is no respecter of persons (Romans 2:11).

If He forced all, or any for that matter, where would be the obedience? Where would be the love? The honor?

The divine economy does not call for automatons. The simply stated qualification is, **“If any man wills to do his will . . .”**

Doubtless the psalmist quickly sensed the immaturity and lack of logic in this petition, even as we become conscious of improper requests which find their way into our prayer utterances. Here is his correction:

**“Incline my heart unto thy testimonies”** (v. 36), he hurriedly urges.

In other words, if it is not consonant with God's will to force him on to victory, and it is not, perhaps the Lord might tilt his affections in that direction. **“As the tree bends, so it falls.”** Is this another unwitting attempt to drive a bargain with the Almighty? The basic factor in this whole matter, as Paul so aptly explained it to the Colossian believers, is a voluntary fixing or setting of our affections on things that are above and away from things on the earth.

**“Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity”** (v. 37), he cries in quick succession.

Now we observe that not only is his heart unsettled, but his eyes as well are not steadfastly focused in the right direction. His inferred question is this: *“If I arrive on a higher plane or spiritual experience, will I be prone to look down longingly upon the more beggarly elements from which I have been delivered?”* This is a trustlessness and may be stated in a dozen ways. The most common rendering today is, How can I hold out?

One thing is sure, victory and vanity cannot coexist. If we are going forward, we will not be going backward. Of course, the condition of the heart and the direction of the eyes make every difference in one's spiritual welfare. Just how vague can we become about matters on which so much hallowed illumination is shed?

We must be convinced that the holy life of walking and talking with God is not the strange enigma which our deceitful hearts would lead us to believe. We must not for one moment permit ourselves to think that the life of victory is divinely offered, and then, as by some invisible cord, subtly snatched from our reach. Never! God does not promise and then retract. He does not offer and then withhold. He does not lead and then disappoint.

We but faintly recall reading somewhere of one who went through an experience similar to that of the person in Psalm 119. This individual had made promise after promise to the Lord, each of which lacked fulfillment. Finally, he determined that such sad failure must cease. “Lord, by six o'clock next Wednesday,” he declared, “I will decide once for all whether or not I will yield to Thee wholly.” The intervening days were spent largely in fasting and prayer.

As the deadline, which he himself had set arbitrarily, drew near, the inward conflict was most intense. He pleaded for an extension of time, but felt strangely obliged to abide by his own time suggestion. Out of the anguish of his soul, he cried,

“O Lord, self-will has been enthroned for so long that it refuses to abdicate!”

This is materially what the early stanzas of Psalm 119 prove. This is, without question, the cause of spiritual defeat in any life. Our day bears a likeness to the days of the Judges when each did that which was right in his own eyes. We have no true means of determining to what extent earnest Christians are inoculated with this prevailing malady. We have operated and controlled our manner of life for so long that it is surprisingly difficult to turn the control over to Him whose right it is to rule supreme.

**“Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes”** (v. 33), he had prayed with an apparently reasonable outlook.

Teaching of course is necessary, indeed indispensable, but why had he not sought it earlier? Even now, why does he not profit more evidently. Surely the outbursts of this stanza are not indicative of being divinely taught.

The Apostle Paul hit the nail on the head when he said, “**Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge [experience] of the truth**” (II Timothy 3:7). He was referring to those who handle but fail to apply the message of the Bible — those who deny themselves the power and privilege of richer things; those who go on with a mere form of godliness.

One commendable fact about the psalmist, however, is his utter abhorrence of defeat.

He tells the Lord that, if he is taught in the way of the divine Statutes, he is determined to “**keep it to the end**” (v. 33). And what end did he have in mind? Obviously the end of his life's journey. This is without doubt the proper outlook. It is the language of true conviction. It has many involvements, but there are marvelous compensations.

*Standing by one's convictions means to maintain an uncompromising attitude with regard to that which is divinely approved.*

- It is a firm refusal to turn from the paths of orthodoxy.
- It is an avowed adherence to the precepts and principles of God's revealed Word.
- It is that kind of spiritual stamina which is able to withstand vicious attacks.
- It is a definite stalwartness of character which remains unaffected in the midst of detracting influences.
- It is that strength of soul which shows no tendency toward surrender of holy ideals.
- It is a determination to press on when others are falling by the wayside.
- It is devotion that maintains its warmth when the spiritual temperature round about is dropping.
- It is a vision which continues its focus upon the coveted goal.
- It is a steadfastness which survives the current epidemic of indifference.
- It is purpose in its faithful display of resoluteness.

Now, it seems that the psalmist's version of his failure to date is attributable to lack of proper instruction. He feels that, if he can receive such instruction from the Lord, the outcome will be both favorable and permanent.

This should be the least of his concern, and the least of ours as well.

The Lord is ever willing to teach us the way. Indeed, He has given copious instructions.

“What more can He say than to you He hath said,  
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?”

It was David who assured, “**Thou wilt show me the path of life**” (Psalm 16:11). God will show anyone who has the desire to be shown and the willingness to obey.

The petition for instruction is followed immediately by the request for understanding (v. 34).

This is quite in order, for it requires understanding to distinguish between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God, between being wise in one's own conceits and wise in the things of the Spirit.

**“Wisdom is the principal thing,”** the great Solomon emphasized, **“therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting, get understanding”** (Proverbs 4:7).

*If worldly wisdom is practical moral intelligence, then godly wisdom is practical spiritual intelligence, and understanding is the appreciation of its value and utility.*

If knowledge acquired in less mature days were crowned with understanding in advancing years, there would be more able servants in the field of Christian enterprise and more spiritual victors in the conquests of righteousness.

Even though the psalmist in this stanza has stopped short of realizing his heart's desire, it is pleasing indeed to hear him, pledge, if and when he is taught in the way of the Lord and has acquired understanding of it, **“I shall observe it with my whole heart”** (v. 34).

When the whole heart can be rallied to the devotion of the Lord, that is victory. That is life on the higher plane.

Some day it will become clear:

- How many times we prayed to the point of receiving an answer, then ceased without realizing the fulfillment of our petitions;
- How many times we almost earned a reward, then became weary in well-doing;
- How many times we almost won a soul to Christ, then gave up;
- How many times we were on the threshold of victory, then wavered.

To know so much and to enjoy so little is pathetic in the extreme. Yet this is the prevailing situation. How very patient the Holy Spirit must be!

One was heard to say recently concerning the diaries of Robert Murray McCheyne and David Brainerd,

“If the Christian life entails as much misery as is expressed” in these personal writings, I can readily understand why there are so few real Christians. Misery? It is always a miserable thing to deal with sin in this life, because sin is miserable, and leads to miserable ends.

- He who sues for victory in Christ must know that every inch will be contested.
- He who would be crucified with Christ, like Paul, must be acquainted with the fact that it is a painful procedure.
- He who strives for the mastery must face the possibility of severe denial.
- He who would mount up on wings as the eagles in spiritual development must expect great opposition.

The adversary loses one battle when the individual is delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Colossians 1:13).

He is loath to lose again in letting that one rise from spiritual immaturity into spiritual strength, from a nominal status to a glorious experience. Hence the struggle. The spirit wars against the flesh (self) and the flesh wars against the spirit. Discomfort is expected in warfare; wounds often result; and in spiritual conquest, we face a vicious and treacherous foe.

We would not wittingly infer that by some battle waged and by some victory gained the individual has lifted himself to the higher plane of Christian experience. That would be grossly misleading. No, in this respect, as in all others, without Christ one can do nothing — absolutely nothing that counts in Heaven.

*The real victory comes not by struggle, but by surrender; and it is this surrender which constitutes the towering problem for the average person.*

That full willingness to let go and let God have His way in the life is the very last move anyone is disposed to make.

The reader must conclude, with the facts in hand, that the young man of Psalm 119 is engaging in a real conflict.

- He is not suffering from hallucinations.
- He is of a sound mind.
- He is not visionary.
- He is a realist.
- He knows what he desires.
- He is assured of its attainment.

One fact is burning its way into his soul: “**Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart**” (v. 2).

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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