

Seek Me, O God!

Psalm 119:176

PREPARED BY
KEN GEHRELS
PASTOR
CALVIN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF OTTAWA
ONTARIO, CANADA



It was a terrifying 24 hours for little Jacob Berg. The five year old son of Mexican migrant workers was visiting an eastern Ontario farm and became lost in a corn field. He'd been playing an innocent game of "hide 'n seek" with his siblings and became



disoriented. No wonder. The corn stood over six feet high. And

was planted close together. Searchers indicated that you couldn't see more than a couple of rows in any direction.

Little Jacob became hopelessly lost. For some 24 hours he wandered, finally lying down in the field, staring straight up at the sky, eyes wide open, not moving. Dehydrated. Cold.

What he didn't know is that he was laying only about 100 metres from the road, and from safety. Yet, for him, it may as well have been 100 kilometres.

Jacob was terrified.

His parents were beside themselves.

Searchers, many of them also parents, threw themselves totally into the task, thinking, "this could so easily have been my child."

That little, precious boy, who had been home, had wandered away. Top priority, the **only** thing that mattered, was to get him home. As soon as possible. Get him home before something dreadful would happen.

And, ditto for the lost person. Little Jacob ached to come home. He was in shock when found. Being away from the safety of home and family had traumatized him.

He knew where he needed to be, and wanted to be. But he couldn't get there. He was **powerless** to get there.

The only ones with the power were the searchers. They had the dogs, the helicopters, the radios and the compasses.

And what enormous relief when he was found!
For everybody!

I'd like you to think of Jacob as you read Psalm 119 with me this morning.

It's one of the psalms that most people skip over. If for no other reason than the length - 176 verses.

Psalm 119 is carefully written in 22 sections of 8 verses each.

Each section begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet (*aleph, beth, gimmel, daleth... tav; a, b, c, d...z... 22 of 'em*).

It is a song of praise, celebrating God's Word in Scripture. Psalm 119 celebrates that in a manner similar to what we might do, say, at a wedding when we come up with a little poem for each letter of the names of the bride and groom. This writer did a little poem for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each poem celebrates the revealed Word of God.

If you took the time to read the whole thing (and, you know, it's really NOT that bad - only 5 pages!) you'd see, again and again, a deep passion in the heart of the writer to be close to God; a determination to live in the revealed will of God; to walk in a way that pleases the Lord.

It's his continual prayer. It's his driving passion.

For example, have a look at verses 32-38:

32 I run the way of your commandments, for you enlarge my understanding.

33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to the end.

34 Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.

35 Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.

36 Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain.

37 Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; give me life in your ways.

38 Confirm to your servant your promise, which is for those who fear you.

The Psalmist looks eagerly for direction from God's Word.
He sees life in God's Word.

Hence v.72, "The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces."

He is committed to sticking with it:

verse 93, "I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life."

AND... He is NO quitter, this Psalmist isn't!

v.110, "The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts."

That's the Psalm.

A celebration of faith and life in the ways and word of God.

Now go with me to the very end of the Psalm.

This would be the place to summarize all the commitment and passion and love and devotion which pulses through every previous section of the Psalm, right?

A concluding stanza of praise to God, right?

Section *Taw* - section 22

Let's read it together:

69 Let my cry come before you, O LORD; give me understanding according to your word.

170 Let my supplication come before you; deliver me according to your promise.

171 My lips will pour forth praise, because you teach me your statutes.

172 My tongue will sing of your promise, for all your commandments are right.

173 Let your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts.

174 I long for your salvation, O LORD, and your law is my delight.

175 Let me live that I may praise you, and let your ordinances help me.

176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek out your servant, for I do not forget your commandments.

Can you believe it?

This amazing psalm of devotion and love ends like this:

176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek out your servant, for I do not forget your commandments.

Gone astray - headed off in the wrong direction.

It's exactly the same language used in Isaiah 53:6, "*We all like sheep have gone astray.*"

We all — perhaps there's a warning for us here at Calvin CRC not to sit back in judgement, or read this piece like disinterested spectators.

Perhaps the "ALL" includes us — could it be?

Gone astray like a lost sheep.

That word "LOST" in Hebrew meaning going in a deadly direction.

Like *DEAD*.

Like little Jacob would have been in that corn field if things had gone on much longer.

I have gone astray like a lost sheep;

seek out your servant, for I do not forget your commandments.
Comes as a shock, doesn't it?

Here's this passionate believer who writes this deeply devoted poem...
and he concludes with a plea for divine rescue!

Is it a case of spiritual manic-depression?
High for God one minute, and lowest of low the next?
Committed in the morning, and quitting in the evening?

Actually - what you're looking at is blunt spiritual realism.
And, though it may not seem that way, the two sentiments belong side by side.
At least, they belong side by side on this side of heaven.
On this side of heaven there will always be **two tugs** in the heart and mind of a
believer – **every believer!!**

The one is the tug of **divine passion**.
It is the pull towards our spiritual home, towards our divine Father, towards
holy life, towards his revealed truth and plan for living, towards a pure and
vibrant relationship with the Lord.
That's the first tug - one to celebrate, one to savour.

Then there's the second.
It is the **tug of temptation**.
It is the seductive call to do whatever happens to feel good for the moment;
the inner magnet drawing us to what is convenient; the pull towards doing
whatever we want - as long as we don't get caught or hurt anyone else.

We cherish the first tug, and crave ever more of it.
We fight the second tug, but won't be rid of it till we stand before the Lord.

Blessed is the believer who recognizes these two, and is able to walk
accordingly!

For such a believer is like the tax collector sinner man that Jesus
commends in Luke 18. That believer goes into the temple well aware of God's
greatness and his own smallness. In that awareness he prays, "*God, be
merciful to me, a sinner.*" And he is able to leave church with a happy heart
and head held high.

It is the attitude of the apostle Paul. In one breath he exclaims, "*But I am
not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure*

that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him." (2 Tim 1:12).

There is passion, there is commitment, there is devotion to his Lord and Saviour.

And then, well then there is the title that Paul the great apostle and missionary gives to himself. To his friend and associate Timothy, whom he had encouraged with the words of confidence in Christ, to that same friend he writes:

The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners -- of whom I am the foremost.

1 Tim 1:15

He wasn't setting himself up with false humility.

Paul meant exactly what he wrote.

He experienced both pulls that I mentioned - and experienced them both intensely!

That's also why he wrote the great letter to the Romans to include both chapters 6 and 7.

In chapter 6 he calls with passion for believers to leave behind a life of sinful indulgence and passionate doing of whatever -

consider that as dead, and grab hold of the free gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ.

And then in chapter 7 we find verses 14-25 under the heading, "*the Inner Conflict*".....

v.22: For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind...

wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me?.... Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Paul lines himself right up with Psalm 119.

There is fiery passion and determination to be completely sold out to God.

No compromise.

No other options.

And there is the sobering realization that along the way of living out that passion, there are times when he trips up and loses his way and begins to stumble, head-long, towards eternal darkness.

He begins to stumble, and if someone doesn't step in to catch him, he'll be lost forever!!

So....Thanks be to God
through Jesus Christ our Lord!!

Through who?
Through Jesus.
Our rescuer.

The one who is the Good Shepherd seeking lost sheep.
Sheep that are part of the fold, but have somehow lost their way.
Sheep that belong home.
Sheep that need rescuing.

Ones who pray Psalm 119:176
I have gone astray like a lost sheep;
seek out your servant, for I do not forget your commandments.

Believers who know what they believe;
who want to live out that belief;
who care passionately for the Lord of that belief;
but find themselves incapable of coming home to Him alone.
 who can't chart their faith course, much less follow it on their own
 without stumbling, bumbling and getting thoroughly lost.
 like little Jacob in the cornfield.
 even if they're only 100 metres from the right place, they
 may as well be 100 kilometres away - it wouldn't make
 any difference. They're still totally lost.

Which, friends, is you and me.

Please understand that.

If you can't accept this truth, you're lining yourself up for a huge, and very nasty spiritual surprise at some point in the future - probably sooner than you care to think.

And then what happens is that really corrosive thinking sets in; defeatist thinking; deadly thinking.

Stuff like:

*I've been to church, I've said my prayers and read my scriptures,
surrounded myself with Christian friends, listen to inspirational music...*

and still

STILL.....

*O God, I must be a spiritual failure.
I must not be cut out for being a Christian.
Perhaps I should quit.*

Friends, when you have seasons where you feel spiritually strong, rejoice.
But also, be VERY CAREFUL!
Lest your guard come down, and your fall be all the harder!

And do what? What is utmost in the arsenal of spiritual defence?

Prayer!

Prayer to the God who protects.

Prayer to the God who seeks.

Prayer to the God who finds.

Prayer to the God who restores.

Prayer to the One who is...

"...my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures: He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Psalm 23).

Our Lord is more determined to rescue you than you are to being rescued.
He is more determined to save us than those searchers were to find little Jacob in the cornfield.

He is **SO** determined that sent His son.
In whose name we baptised Seth - who also will experience this dual pull.
But who now carries the mark of Jesus.

To Seth, and to all of us, comes the strong promise of the Saviour who left heaven to seek and save the lost - John 10:

*"I am the good shepherd.
I lay down his life for the sheep.
I know my own and my own know me,
My sheep hear my voice.
I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.
No one will snatch them out of my hand."*

That's his sure promise.
And, unlike us, he experiences no dual tugs.
He is singular, and uncompromising, in his passion to save us!

Pray to him.
Reach to him.
Call to him.

Ask for Him to work the great promise of Psalm 23 and lead you in the path of righteousness for His name's sake.

Pray it... and believe it that, as Jude writes,
he is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing... (v.24)

That great and final day when we will be brought eternally home.
To the rejoicing song of the angels.
And to the wonderful words of the Father,
"Well done, good and faithful servant. Well done, in Jesus."