

# How to Live by Faith

*Psalm 119*

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**Bible Text:** Psalm 119:81-88  
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I had the privilege of meeting that young man a few weeks ago in our guest reception, maybe a few months ago, relocated from the Tupelo, Mississippi area. For those of you who don't know, our family spent three years in the great state of Mississippi and you know, you know you're having a conversation with someone from Mississippi when you talk about some of your favorite restaurants are located in a gas station. I'm just here to tell you that was some good, good eating out there.

Nonetheless, tonight, let me encourage you to turn in your Bibles to Psalm 119. Let me reiterate something I shared this morning. I know there's 22 section in Psalm 119. I'm sure you're familiar with that by now. There's just not enough Sundays in the morning to get through Psalm 119 this, quote, spring semester so we're kind of double timing on Sunday evenings as well. Tonight, we're gonna be in verses 81 through 88 and there's two reasons this section is critical for us tonight. Number one, this is the midpoint. In fact, when we end tonight, we are at the midpoint. We have walked through the first half of Psalm 119. So that's kind of key there. The second thing I want to bring your attention is the title of the message, "How to Live by Faith." Now that's a problematic passage. Let me tell you why, because in this context, particularly on a Sunday evening, that is one of those subject matters that's pretty familiar. It's something that I'm sure each and every one of us could give a dozen different descriptions of what it looks like to live by faith, advice on how to live by faith. I mean, that is kind of the theme of the Bible is that we live by faith. Here's the struggle, it is such a familiar concept, I think we forget the impact of what it really means. And tonight, before we read verses 81 through 88, I want to give an illustration. It is from the sports world, but it's an illustration that I hope will resonate with your life tonight.

One of the all-time great baseball players, at least in the modern era, was a former short stop at the New York Yankees by the name of Derek Jeter. If you're not familiar with him, Hall of Famer, Golden Glove, I mean he's one of those guys. He is and will one day in the New York Yankees organization be quote unquote immortalized by them, okay? He played shortstop and by the time he was in his mid-30s, he was starting to age, so to speak. Now, I think we'd all admit, those of us who know a thing or two about baseball, to play shortstop, you've got to be pretty quick. I mean, that's not just position you can go out there haphazardly. You've got to have your head on a swivel, so to speak. Well, they

noticed that he was a little bit slower than he used to be and they began to call into question whether he was going to continue to be a shortstop. For those who don't know the game of baseball, when somebody can't play shortstop anymore, typically we move them to third base because you don't have to move as much, right? He didn't want to do that. He wasn't a natural third baseman. They already had a third baseman they were paying a whole lot of money to. And so he needed to figure out how to figure out shortstop, a position he played his entire life. They brought an expert in, you know, one of these guys that analyzes everything and here's what they discovered. You ready for this? A guy who's in the Hall of Fame had spent his entire life every time he moved to the left stepping wrongly. Now, you think about that. If these balls are being hit at the speed at which they're being hit, you've got to step properly so that you get an advantage on the ball. And they discovered that he was actually stepping improperly to the left side. He was great going to his right. He struggled going to his left. They calculated that since he was a child, listen to this, he had, in attempting to catch a ball, had moved to his left over 2.3 million times and he had done it wrong every single time. So in the off season of his 34th year, he spent the entire time taking steps to his left. That doesn't sound very professional, does it? Doesn't sound like a Hall of Fame off season, but he had to retrain his mind, he had to retrain his thinking how do you actually step properly to the left? Now, as Paul Harvey would say, the rest of the story is that he's only short stop in the history of the game to win a Gold Glove after age 35. But he was willing to admit that that which he knew so well had an error in it, it had a flaw and it needed just a touch of correction. And so tonight we're coming to a passage with a title of a subject matter that most of us just assume we've got figured out, maybe tonight the Lord is going to show us how to take that step just a little bit differently.

Verse 81 of Psalm 119 says,

81 My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word. 82 Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me? 83 For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes. 84 How many are the days of thy servant? when wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me? 85 The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law. 86 All thy commandments are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully; help thou me. 87 They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts. 88 Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.

Now, if we were to be honest with ourselves, particularly for those that have been in every study of every verse of this great chapter of the Bible, there comes a point, we're at the midway, can we be honest with ourselves, it all starts to sound the same, doesn't it? I mean, it's almost like we're just describing the same thing over and over with a little different mannerisms and vocabulary and so it's rightfully so this is right in the middle because this all deals with how do we walk by faith, and today I want to deal with two situations in our life, the conditions of life that often befall us and the circumstances that we find ourselves in.

Let's begin with the conditions. Verse 81, "My soul fainteth for thy salvation." I have not in my own personal life, I have never to my knowledge personally fainted. I've never fainted. But if you do as many funerals and weddings as I've done, you've seen a whole lot of people do it. Sometimes it's because of excessive heat. Sometimes it's because of nerves. In fact, there was a time where I was officiating a wedding, we had a young man, obviously the men are to my left, the women to my right. This young man stood in excess of six foot seven inches in height. He accidentally locked his knees and there he went right in the middle of the wedding service. Now the good news was it was at a Methodist church. You say, "Why is that good news?" Because they've got rails and the rail caught him. So that was a good problem in that one. But I've seen grooms faint at their own weddings. I've seen family members faint at the funerals of a loved one. Some of you have seen people faint at a ball game. When we faint, there is a sense of disparity. There's a sense of despair. There's a sense of almost an overwhelmingly of that.

"My soul faints for thy salvation." I'm sure that each and every one of you can testify that there have been conditions in your life that were overwhelming emotionally in excess of and you felt in your soul that you had fainted. Now in your flesh you may have been standing upright. In fact, one of the things that I've discovered is a lot of times we can still function even though we're fainting on the end side, and so when we talk about living by faith, and I know most and every one of you understand this, it's not always gonna be a glorious golden road. There are gonna be times, there's gonna be conditions where our soul is fainting and merely in the flesh we are simply just functioning.

Then verse 82, "Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?" See, there's one thing to be thankful, there's another thing that your eyes are failing you and what that verse means is there are times, and I'm sure you've walked through this at some level in your life, where you know what the Bible says, you know the Bible's true, you believe it, you've taught it, you've promoted it, but you're not seeing it. I'll tell you, there's been so many times in my life I know what the Bible says, but my eyes have failed to see it before them. How many promises, how many guarantees, how many assurances that we have in the word of God that we've seen others receive the blessings thereof but maybe not ourselves. See, there's times where our soul is fainting. There are times where our eyes are failing to see the hand, the work, and the moving of God.

But then there's verse 83, "I've become like a bottle in the smoke, yet do I not forget thy statutes." The faithfulness of God. You know, one of the, quote, blessed curses of living by faith is that we subscribe to and we believe that God is able, capable, and willing, but it does not guarantee that we will see it manifested before our eyes. That is why the scriptures are so important, because it shares with us, it shows us similar stories, similar circumstances, similar conditions in other people's lives where we're longing for God to move in ours, and we saw him move in theirs, and because he moved in theirs, it opens up the possibility for him to move within ours. I could literally take the rest of your evening sharing with you stories from people who have come and shared with me about our Bible memorization project. Story after story, email after email of individuals. Some of the chapters of the Bible are familiar to them, some they were complete strangers to. They begin to walk through, they begin to study, they begin to place it in their heart and

they realize the gravity and the weight and the truthfulness of God's word, and it's been, I cannot tell you how many people have come up to me face to face telling me about the chapter they're memorizing and it takes about 10 seconds for the tears to start falling. Because what are they seeing? The faithfulness of God in passages that they never dreamed they would see so, passages that oftentimes don't come up in sermon series or Sunday School lessons, passages that if we'd be honest with ourselves, before this calendar year, we even questioned why were they even there? And yet we discover time and time again, God is faithful.

So our soul often is fainting, our eyes are failing to see even though we trust in the faithfulness of God. These are the conditions of what it looks like to live by faith. Now, again, I mentioned there are dozens of examples that we could give, but my favorite from a cinematography perspective is from what we know as "Raiders of the Lost Ark." You know the great Indiana Jones saga. Some of you may remember that in one of the movies, there was this great scene where, whom we know as Indiana, had to walk across a cavern. It was a walk of faith and he had to walk and place his foot, not seeing the ground below him, and the ground would not manifest until his foot had the pressure upon it, literally placing his life at the extent of falling over if he was in the wrong place. That is a perfect description of what faith is. You believe it, you know it, but you haven't seen it, and you're simply walking in it.

See, our conditions, our fainting, failing in faithfulness, but let's look at some circumstances and when I use the term circumstances, what I mean by that, what are the circumstances that we've got to pay attention in our life to quote unquote remind us of how to live by faith? Verse 84, "How many are the days of thy servant? when wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?" One of the verses in scripture that just resonates with me is Job chapter 14 verse 5. It says that God numbers the days of a man's life. Now oftentimes we look around and we ask these two very difficult questions. You've asked them, I'm gonna ask them for you. First question we ask is this, why did they go so soon? The second question is, why am I still here? Because there are times where we feel as if this mortal body has come to its end, but the Lord is still sustaining. There are other times where we question why that one is gone way too early.

I know I've shared this story with you before, but there are some stories that I just can't tell enough. Had an individual years ago in another state, his best friend passed away. A man that he, both of them had been widows for years and they had found solace and comfort in one another. They probably ate lunch or breakfast together five, six days a week. I mean, they were just, if you saw one, you saw the other. We were there at the visitation the night before the service. This World War II veteran put his arm around me. He was shaking tears and he said, "Pastor, he was just so young." And I said, "Sir, with all due respect, he was 94." He said, "I know, but I'm 97." Only the Lord knows our days.

Remember the circumstance of, remember. One of the things that when it comes to walking by faith that we must do is remember that if the Lord provides us a day, it's because he has provided the day. If it wasn't from his hand, we would not experience the day or the opportunity. It is God himself who numbers our days and one of the things we

need to do is remember that the life that we have within the conditions that we're living in, when our soul is fainting, when our eyes are failing, to remember that if the Lord had not given us the ability to get through this situation or scenario, he would not have given us this day. See, our days are not in our hands. Our days are in his. Now, just a quick reminder before we go to the next point. It does say that God numbers our days, but in the book of Proverbs, it says a fool can shorten his days. The Lord told us there's nothing we could do to add a day, but you can be dumb enough to subtract one. That's a biblical truth.

Secondly, in verse 85, "The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law" So we remember the facts that we wouldn't have the day we have if it were not for him granting and allowing, but there's a realization and this is a difficult one when it comes to walking by faith. I'm going to give you a hundred percent guarantee as a believer in Jesus Christ you are going to be done wrong. People are going to do you wrong. People are going to manipulate situations. People are going to concoct stories and lies and fictitious things. It says the proud have digged a pit for me. What does that mean? That's a picture. You're just walking through life doing everything you're supposed to do and all of a sudden you fall in a pit you didn't know was there. The wicked will do so. It is a realization that when we walk by faith, when we trust the Lord in whatever the scenario or the situation is, it's not always going to be rosy. It's not always gonna be streets of gold. There are those in this world who are wicked, as the Bible said. It's easy to trust the Lord on the mountaintop. It's tough to do it in the valley. It is easy to trust the Lord in abundance. It's tough when there's a lacking thereof. It's easy when there's health and wealth. It's difficult in the opposite.

You know, there is a movement in our culture today, in fact, it's a worldwide phenomenon, you may be familiar with it, it's called the prosperity gospel. The prosperity gospel basically says this, that the Lord has favored you if you're experiencing health and you're experiencing wealth. That is the mark of God's faithfulness. That is the mark that you're headed the right direction. Here's the problem with that. What happens when you're sick and what happens when you're broke? Because the last time I checked, some of the most faithful men and women in the Bible were imprisoned and bankrupt, but had the favor and the hand of God upon them all the days of their life. It is a very Western, materialistic, can I say, perversion of the text of the Bible what we know as the quote unquote prosperity gospel because according to what we just read, if you are walking in faith, the wicked are gonna do you wrong, the world is gonna hem you up and go sideways.

So what do we do? Verse 86 and 87, resilience. "All thy commandments are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully; help thou me. They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts." I want you to notice what that says when it talks about resilience. It says, "They almost got me. They almost had me. I came to a point where I almost thought that God, you were going to give up on me. You were going to somehow allow me to fall, fail, and/or falter." But notice twice, both in verse 86 and 87, it says, "thy commandments are faithful. I forsook not thy precepts." I know you expect me to say what I'm about to say, but I'm going to say it anyway. When you are on the last knot

of the rope of despair, the only thing you have to hold onto is what the word of God says. That's it. People come and people go. Perspectives come and go, opinions come and go, but the word of God, as we're gonna see next Sunday morning in verse 89, is settled in heaven forever. Sometimes the only thing you have is the word of God.

So allow me to go on a tangent here. How dare we become a people who do not have access to the word of God? What I mean by that, and I know you're familiar with this, one of the reasons that we're taking the Bible and memorizing and placing it in our heart is because there have been times in the past, and I believe there are days coming, where what we know as access to the word of God may be limited or none at all. And I've got news for you, they can shut down the grid and they can stop the printing presses, they can't rip it out of our heart because it's there. And what does it say there? That resilience when things are tough, when things are rough, when they do not go as we'd hoped and/or desired, it says "thy commandments are faithful," and it says, "I forsook not thy precepts."

Now, maybe I'm the only person in the room, but I'm gonna be transparent and honest about it. Have you ever had a time, have you ever had a moment in your life where you know what the Bible says, you've been taught it, you've been preached it, and maybe even had it memorized, but there was a situation happening where you questioned if it was even true, because you weren't seeing it, you weren't experiencing it, you weren't walking it, and you began to question, "Is it actually valid, is it just for other people, does it not apply to me?" He says, "I did not forsake thy precepts." There are times we're in our flesh, we get close, but living by faith says it may not make sense, other people may say I'm crazy, but God said it, so I'm gonna believe it.

I'm gonna give you a personal story from our family. You know, we joke about, and it's kind of a colloquial phrase in our culture, that every family has a black sheep. Y'all know what that means, right? See, some of y'all got some sheep. We got a whole flock, if y'all know what that means. That being said, I had a great uncle of mine. I didn't spend a whole lot of time with him, and you understand why, he was part of the flock. I had a great grandmother that lived to be in her early 90s. Now, this is something in the Meyers family. Now, she wasn't a Meyers, she was on the other side, she was on my mom's side. We called her little grandmother. You say, little, how small was she? She died, she was 4'6". osteoporosis can get you, if you know what I'm saying. She was a little bitty lady who actually married a big old man, but everybody came out little. That's a whole other story. Nonetheless, she had a son that was rebellious. She had a son that was wayward. I never, as a young child, I never remember a meal that I had in her home that she did not pray for her son to get saved. When we buried her, I was there, he was still lost. He got saved at age 84. Guess what? Her soul was fainting, her eyes were failing, but she did not forget the word of God. I hate to tell you this, but you may not see it this side of glory. You may not have the privilege of walking in faith and seeing what you want to see before you are, quote, technically with the Lord.

A resilience means even though I don't see it, even though I don't experience it, I'm going to trust, I'm going to walk in faith anyway, and then finally, verse 88, "Quicken me after

thy lovingkindness, so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth." That word to quicken, it's the word that we find in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. It's a word we find in 1 Timothy chapter 4 that speaks about that time where the dead in Christ and the alive in Christ will be quickened or immediately taken up with the Lord. But it's also a biblical word that means to bring revival. It means to bring life in the face of death. It means to be translated from an arena of death to an arena of life. If you were to go to Acts chapter 16, and you were to make your way to the inner part of that Roman jail, you would see a man whom we know as Saul of Tarsus, the Apostle Paul, and his sidekick, Barnabas. They had been beaten, mocked, made fun of, harassed, deprived, and starved, but I can tell you that night at midnight when they sang, they had been quickened. They had been revived.

I think one of the greatest compliments that a believer in Jesus Christ can receive is that when everything in your life is sideways and burned down, and people look at you and say, "How are you doing it? How do you have your countenance? How do you have your confidence?" It's not because of what your flesh feels, because what does the flesh do? Your soul faints. It's not because of what your eyes see, because your eyes are failing. It's because of what verse 88 says, "Quicken me after thy lovingkindness." Give me life in the midst of death. Give me an awakening, a revival in the midst of what I'm walking through.

You know, one of the testimonies that we have all over the world, both from the mission fields to others, is really kind of somewhat strange and it goes, again, against what I mentioned of the prosperity gospel earlier. One of the amazing phenomenas about biblical Christianity is this, it actually thrives in adverse conditions. If you don't believe me, ask the Roman Empire the first four centuries. Do you realize in the first 300 years of Christianity, the Roman government issued 10 formal decrees giving permission and making it legal to kill Christians. By the time we entered the fourth century, there were so many Christians, you know what the Roman Empire said? If you can't beat them, you join them, and they declared Christianity the quote unquote religion of the empire.

The reason I allude to that in closing is this, when it comes to walking by faith, most of us think our faith will increase if our conditions and circumstances are better. You know, biblically speaking, it actually works in the opposite. I don't like it. But let me ask you this question, when are you more apt to cry out to God, when things are great or when things are rough? When are you more apt to get on your face before God, when you get a promotion or you get a pink slip? When are you more apt to trust the Lord, when there's an abundance of wealth or when you don't know where your next meal's gonna come from? What we discover right here in the middle of Psalm 119 is that the conditions of life may be tough, but it's the circumstances that we allow ourselves to be in that make all the difference. Remember that if it were not for God himself, you would not have the day or the situation, the scenario you're in. The realization, bad things are gonna happen and people are gonna be mean to you, the resilience of not forgetting the word of God and hanging in there even if you don't see it on this side of glory, and finally knowing that God can bring revival, God can quicken you no matter what the situation is.

I wanna close with a story tonight, one of the most admirable men I've ever met in my life. His last name was pronounced Kanata. He's unfortunate, he's passed on to be with the Lord. He's a retired missionary doctor. He served in a very tumultuous, most difficult place of the world. I had the opportunity to meet with him some years ago and he shared his story with me and because of being a medical doctor, yes he was a missionary but he was a medical doctor, he got lumped in with a group of people that were seen as political dissidents and he was charged with a crime that he never committed and he was made a prisoner of war. I want you to hear what I'm about to tell you. This man of God who forsook our Western materialistic abundance to go into a land that you can only imagine, took all of his education, all the ability he could have in this culture, he found himself, listen, for three years, he was in a bamboo cage that measured four by four by four feet. That's all his existence was.

I remember one day, he was older in his years, I was young in mine, I asked him, I said, "When you look back, how do you grasp this?" You know what he told me? I'll never forget this. He said, "Jeff, let me be honest, there's days I miss that cage." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Because in that cage, I knew the only thing I had was God. Outside of it, how easy it is to replace him by something or somebody else." Walking by faith is the understanding that he, God, is all we've got.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. Tonight as we come to our conclusion, our time of decision, I know it's Sunday evening. I know the demographics of what tonight is. But maybe you're that soul, maybe you're that person tonight that the Lord brought here for the single purpose of showing your need to be forgiven and to be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. Maybe when we talk about walking by faith, you're that one tonight said, "You know what, I've never exercised faith, I've never believed, I've never called on the name of the Lord to be saved." Maybe tonight's the night. Tonight's the night where you just simply cry out and confess that you have a sin condition that only Jesus Christ can fix. Maybe tonight's the night, and it is as the Bible says, the day of your salvation. But I would say for the majority of us, we've been walking with the Lord for years, some of you for decades, and oftentimes we talk about living by faith and walking by faith, but like an old ball player, sometimes we need to step back and realize maybe we're not stepping properly. Maybe tonight the Lord has shown you the next step, how to step, when to step, where to step, as you exercise faith in him and nobody and nothing else.

*Lord Jesus, thank you. God, I want to thank you tonight that you don't give up on us. Lord, I'll confess on behalf of all of us, if we were in charge, we'd already given up on everybody. God, you haven't given up on us. In fact, tonight you showed us from your word that you have a plan, you have a purpose, that you have a desire and a goal for our life, and that is to trust you over and above in exclusion of anybody and everything else. God, forgive us, we've put so much trust in so many things that are not you. May tonight, as we have a time of response, if necessary, may we exercise faith in a public decision, but at minimum, may we walk out of here tonight, walking in faith. It is in the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.*