

# How to Persevere as a Christian in Tough Times

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     So we're going to turn to God's Word together, and Edwards is continuing to lead us through this great 119th Psalm. So we're going to read Psalm 119, verses 17 to 24.
- Psalm 119, and we're going to read verses 17 to 24. The psalmist says, You rebuke the insolent, accursed ones who wander from your commandments.
- Take away from me scorn contempt, for I have kept your testimonies. Even though princes sit plotting against me, your servant will meditate on your statutes.
- Your testimonies are my delight. They are my counselors. Amen. This is God's Word.
- Well, good morning, friends. Our title for the sermon this morning is How to Persevere as a Christian in Tough Times. And perhaps you turn with me again to Psalm 119.
- [ 1 : 5 0 ]     You'll find it on page 512 in our big hardback Bibles. And our section for today is verses 17 to 24, the section that was read a few minutes ago.
- So verses 17 to 24, the third of the 22 sections of this psalm. Now, over the last couple of weeks, we've been studying these first two sections, verses 1 to 16.
- And those first two sections have focused on the psalmist's relationship to God's words in his own personal life. Those two stanzas, verses 1 to 16, are about his personal walk with the Lord.
- So, for example, look down at verse 4. You'll see it's about his need to keep God's precepts diligently. Then verse 7 is about learning the Lord's righteous rules.
- He's on a learning curve. Verses 9 and 11 are about guarding his life against sin by storing up God's Word in his heart. So it's as though the camera has been focusing upon him, just on him, his mind, his heart, his conduct, in relation to the words of God.
- [ 3 : 0 2 ]     But when we get to verses 17 to 24, the camera widens its angle and we suddenly see the figure of enemies, the psalmist's enemies who are lurking in the shadows.
- Look at them, verse 21. Insolent, accursed ones who, in verse 22, hold him in scorn and contempt. And powerful people, in verse 23, princes, he calls them, who sit plotting.
- Plotting not just against the faith in general, but against the psalmist himself. Against me, as he puts it in verse 23. Now, it's not as though those first two stanzas have left us entirely in our comfort zone.
- In verses 1 to 16, our friend the psalmist is wrestling with his own nature. His own tendency to wander from the Lord's ways. But the introduction of these wretched enemies in the third stanza brings in a new element altogether.
- Now, it's not as though our psalmist is without friends. He does have friends. Look, for example, at verse 74. 74. Those who fear you, he says, shall see me and rejoice.
- [ 4 : 1 5 ]     Those are some of his friends. Or verse 79. Let those who fear you turn to me, that they may know your testimonies. And that verse strongly suggests that the psalmist is a teacher who is expounding God's teaching to his friends.
- But the enemies are much more prominent in Psalm 119 than the friends of the psalmist. And it's here in verses 21, 22, and 23 that they first make their presence felt.

But we're going to carry on meeting them again as the psalm develops. Now, this theme of enemies is a theme that runs right the way through the Bible.

Just think of the psalms as a whole. King David's name is attached as author to 73 of the 150 psalms. 73. And as I was reading through the psalms a few years ago, the question came to me, how many of David's psalms don't mention the enemies?

The answer is only two or three. Out of 73 psalms, only two or three don't mention his enemies. The enemies of the king of Israel are simply everywhere. And the main reason for this is that David foreshadows Jesus as the ultimate king of Israel.

[ 5 : 29 ] And it's the enemies of Jesus who are so prominent. It's they who hounded him to death. But equally, it's his enemies over whom Jesus, the warrior king, ultimately will triumph.

The Bible promise is that God will put all the enemies of Christ under his feet in the end. So cosmic warfare is one of the great themes of the Bible.

The final outcome of the great war is never in doubt. God sent Jesus not only to save the lost, but also to conquer the devil and every evil power that is at work in the world.

Jesus is the ultimate victor. But before the ultimate victory is won, the foot soldiers on the battlefield, people like our psalmist, people like you and me, are likely to feel the force of hostile attack again and again.

As Jesus said to the apostles, if the world hates you, what he means by that is the world will hate you as you know. He says, if the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

[ 6 : 36 ] Friends, we shall not understand the Bible or the gospel until we understand the reality of this warfare. There's a strange paradox at work here.

On the one hand, ultimate safety is to be found in the church, in the membership of God's people and only in the church. That is safety in the world to come.

But in this world, to be a member of Christ's church is to step into the firing line. It is to put one's head above the parapet. And that's the way to understand our psalmist in verses 17 to 24.

His enemies, including powerful men, princes, are plotting against him, speaking against him with scorn and contempt. But he knows how to persevere in the midst of this long battle.

And that's what he's teaching us in this passage. Perseverance on the long haul. So let's look at the lessons that he teaches in this section. And I've got three particularly to mention.

[ 7 : 38 ] First of all, he teaches us about the identity of the believer. And this identity is expressed in two phrases here. First of all, the phrase, your servant.

You'll see that phrase in verse 17, deal bountifully with your servant. And again in verse 23, your servant will meditate on your statutes. So that's the first phrase, your servant.

And the second phrase is a sojourner on the earth, which is how he describes himself in verse 19. So let's look at both of these ideas.

First of all, the believer is your servant, God's servant. Now this is a wonderful and true way for the psalmist to describe himself. It's a title of great dignity.

Our psalmist uses it again several times in the course of the psalm. It's the way that he thinks about himself. He thinks of himself as the Lord's servant. Or if he's praying, he addresses the Lord as I'm your servant.

[ 8 : 39 ] It's a title that the apostle Paul uses in the New Testament. He uses it, for example, about Timothy, his friend Timothy. He writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy chapter 2, the Lord's servant, that's you, Timothy, the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome.

In other words, you, Timothy, as a pastor in the church, you must not be quarrelsome. Paul describes himself as the servant or a servant of the Lord. Think of the very opening words of the epistle to the Romans.

Paul writes, Paul, a bond servant of Christ Jesus. Jesus himself is called the Lord's servant. This is what is said of him prophetically by Isaiah.

Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights. I have put my spirit upon him, a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench.

It's a title of dignity and honor. But just think of what it implies. It implies obligation. But it's a two-way obligation, not just one way.

[ 9 : 52 ] Now certainly there's an obligation on the servant. His obligation is to serve his master well and to honor his master. But the master, too, has obligations.

He is obliged to treat his servant well, to look after him, to provide for him. And our verse 17 here hints surely at the covenant obligations of the master.

The psalmist cries out, deal bountifully with your servant. Why? That I may live and keep your word. In other words, it's about your honor, Lord, as well as about my life.

Please deal with me bountifully because I'm your servant. Now look at the relationship between verse 17 and verse 18. Deal bountifully with your servant that I may live and keep your word.

But how is that going to happen? What is going to impel me to keep your word? Answer, verse 18, I need to have my eyes opened so that I may behold and understand and be thrilled by the wonderful things that your law contains.

[ 11 : 00 ] If I can come to understand the glorious truths of the Bible, I shall want nothing more than to live and keep your word. It's as we come to have our eyes open to the truth of the Bible that the Bible becomes precious to us and we really do want to live by it.

This is what Paul wanted as he wrote to the Ephesian Christians. He says to them in Ephesians chapter 1. And at this point he's praying for them, but he's telling them in what terms he's praying for them.

He says this, That having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you. Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened.

Have you ever thought of your heart as having eyes? Eyes that need to be enlightened. But isn't that exactly what our verse 18 is all about?

Open my eyes. Not my physical eyes, but the eyes of my heart. The eyes of my inner understanding. And then I'll be able to grasp the wondrous things that the Bible is full of.

[ 12 : 05 ] So let me ask, friend. Is your Bible at the moment a kind of dead book to you? A book that really brings you neither light nor joy?

If that's the case, then do pray verse 18 for yourself. Lord, open my eyes. I want to see the wonderful things in the Bible which other people are always going on about. But I can't see myself.

Help me to see these things. It's a great prayer for any of us to pray. And the Lord will answer it if we pray it sincerely. Now, doesn't verse 19 help us to understand the prayer of verse 18?

I am a sojourner on the earth. That's why I need to understand your law and your commandments. I am a transient. The earth is not my final home.

That's why I need to understand the truth of the Bible. If the earth were my permanent home, if I knew I was going to live here forever, I'd feel satisfied and happy and secure.

[ 13 : 06 ] But I'm not here forever. I know that human life is all over so quickly. And what happens afterwards? I need to know the bigger picture. So here's the psalmist's second point about his identity, the identity of the believer.

And it's this, that the believer is a sojourner on the earth. Now, the word sojourner, we don't use it every day, but a sojourner is a temporary residence.

So, for example, I live in a house, but I won't be living in it forever. I own a car, but I shan't be driving it forever. I live in a flesh and blood body.

Feels fairly solid. But in a few years' time, this body of mine, which I wash daily, almost daily, and clothe, and to some degree pamper, this body of mine will be scattered to the four winds.

As God said to Adam, you are dust. And to dust you will return. We're sojourners on the earth. That is why the psalmist cries out in verse 19, hide not your commandments from me.

[ 14 : 13 ] It's only as we come to understand the wonderful truths of the Bible that the aching questions raised by our transients receive a gloriously satisfying answer.

For example, as Jesus said to Martha, I am the resurrection of the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.

We are temporary residents on the earth. But if we're Christians, we are permanent residents in God's heavenly kingdom. And verse 20 develops this theme further.

In verse 20, the word translated rules, my soul is consumed with longing for your rules, that word translated rules is perhaps better translated as rulings or judgments.

And the idea of the soul being consumed is a little bit like the old name for tuberculosis, which was consumption. Consumption. A Victorian family whispering outside a bedroom door might say, what's wrong with poor Aunt Agatha?

[ 15 : 23 ] And the reply comes, I'm afraid she's suffering from consumption. She's wasting away from this horrible disease. So what our psalmist is saying in verse 20 is, my soul is wasting away.

It's pining with longing for your judgment in my favor. And this is why it's so closely connected with verse 19 and verse 18. The psalmist is saying, I'm a sojourner.

I'm only here for a short time. I need my eyes to be open to the truth about my life. I need to understand my mortality and the world to come. As one of my commentaries puts it, no separated lover so pines for his beloved as I pine for what your word reveals to me.

That's what verse 20 is about. The believer who has really come to terms with the fact that he is a sojourner on the earth begins to long for the world to come.

The apostle Peter, in his second letter, writes to his Christian readers, we are waiting. We're like gentlemen in waiting or ladies in waiting. We are waiting for the day of God to come.

[ 16 : 33 ] We are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness is at home. Now there's an important entailment to all this.

If a church is preaching and teaching the Bible's true message, there will be a pronounced sense of the world to come in the life and atmosphere and thinking of that church.

There'll be a ready recognition that we're sojourners on the earth. The whole focus of the Bible and of the gospel is after all beyond the end of this world.

What is the message of Jesus all about? Think of the way he sums it up. Repent, he says, and believe the gospel. Why repent? Repent because the day of judgment is coming.

The earth is under judgment. But there is salvation available to anyone who will repent and believe. Well, think of the way Jesus speaks of himself frequently in John's gospel.

[ 17 : 33 ] He says, The son of man must be lifted up on the cross that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

We're sojourners in this world. We live here for a hundred years max. For most of us, rather less than that. But Christ came to rescue us for eternity.

Now the problem is, and you'll be aware of this as you visit other churches, perhaps on holiday or for some other reason. The problem is that many churches these days are very unwilling to preach and teach the gospel of eternal life.

The eyes of many preachers and teachers get focused just on this world. And the world to come drops out of sight. And the teaching tends to be only about life in this world.

Now of course we need the Bible's teaching about life in this world. We need to hear about the Bible teaching us about society and work and marriage, bringing up our children, standing against injustice and so on.

[ 18 : 41 ] Many other things. This worldly matters. But the Bible is primarily and fundamentally about eternity. Christ died and rose again, not so that we should be happy in Glasgow, but so that we should be happy in eternal life, forgiven, accepted, welcomed into the very presence of God to be with him forever.

So here is our psalmist. Here's his identity. And by implication, the identity of every believer. On the one hand, he is God's servant. But on the other hand, he is a sojourner on the earth.

The believer's relationship to this earth is temporary. 70 or 80 years in most cases. But the believer's relationship to God is eternal.

Sojourners on the earth, but God's servants forever. Well, let's move on from the identity of the believer to, secondly, the hostility of the world.

And this brings us to verses 21 and 2 and 3. Look again at those painful words. Verse 21, insolent, accursed ones. Verse 22, scorn and contempt.

[ 19 : 56 ] And in the next verse, princes plotting against me. I wonder if you ever, when you're reading about the hostility that there is in the world towards God's people, do you ever say to yourself, wouldn't it be great if we could just get out of here altogether, out of this world?

Let's leave this rotten world with its hostility to the Lord Jesus. For example, let's have a, why don't we found a Tron farm in the highlands of Scotland? Let's get away from these cities.

Let's buy, let's buy a few hundred acres of nice land somewhere up in the north. Enough to support a few hundred people. We could grow wheat and barley and potatoes. We could have a dairy herd of cows for milk.

We could have a beef herd for beef. A pigsty full of porkers. A flock of chickens, naturally. And we would have a large vegetable garden. We could build our own school, and that would protect our children, so that their minds would not get corrupted by worldly ideas.

Willie Phillip could preach to us every morning at eight o'clock sharp, before we go off to work in the fields. And we'd have a lovely sense of order and discipline. Everybody up at seven o'clock in the morning at the tolling of a bell, and lights out by 10.30 p.m.

[ 21 : 10 ] A good, clean, unpolluted, uncorrupted life in the fresh air. Now, churches and Christian groups have done exactly that kind of thing in the past.

That was more or less the motivation of the Pilgrim Fathers in 1620, as they set off from England and Holland and sailed across the Atlantic to found their new communities on the east coast of America, to get away from the nastiness of life and church life in Europe, and to start afresh with a clean slate, to build a new community under the authority of God.

The problem is that Christian groups who try to escape from the world find that the world goes with them, because our human nature goes with us, and our human nature is corrupted.

Wherever we go, we take it with us. And just think of the way Jesus commissioned his disciples. He didn't say to them, go out of the world. He said, go into all the world and preach the gospel, because it's the world's only hope.

Think of the way Jesus himself faced hostility. He didn't run away from it at all. He faced it. And he preached the gospel to his enemies. And of course, some of them became followers of his.

[ 22 : 28 ] Many didn't, but some did. There's one point in John's Gospel, chapter 5, when he's arguing with a particularly hostile group of Jewish leaders, and he says to them, I'm saying all these things to you so that you may be saved.

He didn't run away from scorn and contempt. He endured it. And when the rulers of society, in the end, sat plotting against him, he braced himself for what he knew had to come, and he submitted to their will, which was to crucify him.

He was also, of course, submitting to his father's will, as he did that. But we cannot evade hostility. We can't avoid the insolence and scorn and contempt of those who set themselves against the Lord Jesus and against the church.

Let me quote to you a grade A, award-winning piece of contempt against the church. Would you like to hear this? Brace yourselves. 40 or 50 years ago, there was a well-known philosopher at Oxford University whose name was Professor Sir Alfred Ayer, Freddie Ayer, A-Y-E-R, and he hated Christianity.

And this is what he wrote in a newspaper article in 1979. Among religions of historical importance, there is quite a strong case for considering Christianity the worst.

[ 23 : 49 ] Why so? Because it rests on the allied doctrines of original sin and vicarious atonement, which are intellectually contemptible and morally outrageous.

Ouch. How can we listen to that kind of scorn without wilting, without perhaps thinking we ought to shift our position a little bit? Well, our psalmist gives us a very strong clue.

Look at verse 23. Even though princes, powerful people, sit plotting against me, your servant will meditate on your statutes.

Now, think of that for a moment. The temptation would be when powerful people sit plotting against us and firing arguments against us, the temptation is to become anxious because of them, to feel that the very gospel is threatened by their attacks and their vilification.

But our psalmist, knowing that powerful people are plotting against him, continues to meditate, verse 23, not on them, not on the powerful people, but on God's teaching.

[ 24 : 59 ] That's what keeps him firm. The person whose faith becomes rock-like and steady is the person who keeps on and on reading the Bible and meditating on God's instruction, even when, especially when, he's under attack.

Now, I don't mean that we shouldn't ever engage with anti-Christian thinking or engage in debate with anti-Christian thinkers. It's wonderful to have people around like Professor John Lennox from Northern Ireland, another Oxford professor, who is a most able Christian thinker and who is willing, you probably know his name, but he's willing to engage in public debate with leading atheists.

In fact, it tends to be the leading atheists who refuse to debate with him because they know full well that he's going to expose the weakness of their arguments. And why is a man like that so able to be confident and bold in the face of their hostility?

It's because, in the words of verse 23, he has spent his lifetime meditating on the Lord's teaching. Our best bulwark against the scorn of the world is the study of the Bible.

That's what verse 23 is telling us. But friends, we will be held in contempt if we stick with the Lord. It's part of the package. As Jesus said to the apostles, remember what I said to you, a servant is not greater than his master.

[ 26 : 23 ] If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too. The only way to avoid scorn and persecution is to become a nominal Christian, to disengage from active service.

Well, that's no way to go, is it? The fierce opposition will come at us. It will come at us from colleagues at work, painfully sometimes from family members.

It will come to us from the government sometimes. Laws will be passed. Laws are being passed, which enshrine and promote godless morality. Even a frustrating, footling little piece of local government regulation, like this ending of free parking in the streets of Glasgow on a Sunday, is a minor piece of hostility towards the Lord's people.

But how should we respond to the scorn of the world? Should we return scorn with scorn or hatred with hatred? Jesus says, love your enemies.

Paul says, bless those who persecute you. Bless them. Do not curse them. Repay no one, evil for evil. We respond by preaching the gospel with love to those who oppose it.

[ 27 : 36 ] So in the face of this hostility, let's notice, third and last, the source of our strength to endure. Verse 24.

Your testimonies are my delight. They are my counselors. So the world will attack and scorn the believer.

But verse 24 shows us the key to real endurance. Now just notice that word delight in verse 24. Your testimonies are my delight.

Delight is one of the big themes of this psalm. We saw it last week at verse 14. In the way of your testimonies, I delight. And verse 16, I will delight in your statutes.

And it comes again several times later in the psalm. Look, for example, at verse 47. For I find my delight in your commandments, which I love.

[ 28 : 33 ] I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love. Delighting, loving, meditating on. These same ideas keep recurring through the psalm.

And their very repetition shows us how important they are. So let's ask the Lord to enable us to delight in his words more and more. It's something which can and should grow as a Christian gets older.

Delighting in his words. There are some things that are easy to delight in. For example, do you delight in holding a newborn baby? Some of you do.

Some of you would rather run a mile than hold a newborn baby, wouldn't you? Do you delight in watching tennis played at the highest level? Probably. Do you delight in Luciano Pavarotti singing Nesso Dorma, hitting that top C or whatever note it is and breaking the glass?

All of us have a number of things that we delight in. But our verse 24 explains why the psalmist delights in God's testimonies. It is because they are his counselors.

[ 29 : 41 ] Now, a counselor means an advisor. Somebody who tells you, who explains to you the best way to act in your particular circumstances. You have a question or a problem, a difficulty.

So you turn to a trusted advisor who gives you good counsel. The counselor opens up, discusses with you the features of your problem, sets the problem in a broader context so that you can understand it more fully.

He helps you to see the length and breadth of the whole business better. He opens up and sharpens your understanding so that you can make a wise decision about the best way forward.

Now, the Bible does all these things for us. It opens up to us the real nature of the human condition, of the human problem, and it shows us the answer to our problems.

In the context of Psalm 119, the particular problem which the psalmist needs help and counsel with is the problem of how to endure scorn and opposition.

[ 30 : 43 ] Well, he does learn to endure it. How? Because his Bible, I think of him writing these words back in, I don't know, eight centuries or so before Christ, his Bible then would have been the law of Moses, the first five books of the Bible.

And he had discovered that it was full of good counsel, not least counsel about enduring opposition. Our psalmist, no doubt, had read the story of Joseph, for example, and of how God was blessing him and was with him and sustaining him, even when he was locked up in prison following a false accusation.

Our psalmist would have read the story of Moses himself, leading the people of Israel in the wilderness for 40 years. How did he endure them? They were so full of rebellion and unbelief and grumbling.

How could Moses stand it for 40 years? Well, our psalmist, he's read these historical records and they've been teaching him how a godly person can keep going and keep trusting God, even in the most trying circumstances.

So let's learn to regard Bible characters like Joseph and Moses and Daniel and Job as our counselors. And even more so, let's learn to think of all the Bible authors, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Peter and Paul, and so on, Isaiah and Jeremiah, the prophets.

[ 32 : 04 ] Let's regard these men as our friends, our teachers who counsel us, who teach us how to put one foot after the other as we walk through life. Human counselors can be helpful to us.

If we get in trouble with our money or our marriages or something else, human counsel can certainly help. But the greatest counselor in the world is the Bible. There is no human problem, no human question, which is not addressed and dealt with by the Bible.

The Bible addresses the human condition. It identifies the problems and it supplies the answers. So let's learn to say with our psalmist, your testimonies are my delight.

I wonder if I can share with you an idea which I've found helpful over the years. Think of yourself reading the Bible at home. You sit down in your big chair. I imagine it's a big chair.

And you open your Bible. As you do that, why not think of yourself as sitting down to a really good meal? Because the Bible, after all, is nourishment to us.

[ 33 : 12 ] Imagine sitting down to a good meal. Most of us, I hope, will manage that in the next hour or two. You sit down, the meal appears in front of you. You might have to do it yourself. In my case, it generally appears in front of me, steaming.

And it's delightful, isn't it? I smell it. I put pepper on it. I squeeze on a drop of sauce. Then I pick up my knife and fork, and with a prayer of thankfulness, I tuck in.

Now, you enjoy that meal, don't you? You wouldn't dream of missing your meal, would you? Unless you were unwell. It's a delight. It's nourishment. It keeps you alive and strong.



Now, think of reading the Bible just like that. You sit down to the Bible. You open up, as it were, your meal time. You breathe in and out with pleasure. You think, in the words of Deuteronomy, man does not live, cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

This Bible is the source of my life, the source of my strength, my understanding of God, my understanding of myself and the world. This is my counselor. And as you read, what happens is you feed your soul.

[ 34 : 22 ] God feeds your soul. You're nourished deep within. You pray, in the words of verse 18, open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

The Lord answers that prayer for you. Of course he does. He loves you because you're his child. To take delight in God's words, to see them as your counselors.

That's the way to endure the scorn of the world and the plotting of princes. Well, friends, I'm nearly done, but let me just pass on another observation about Psalm 119, which I have found very helpful.

It's not immediately obvious, but it's so helpful when you spot it. Our psalmist, throughout this psalm, shows that the believer's life experiences joys and sorrows simultaneously.

Simultaneously. Look at some of the joys. Verse 48. I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love.

[ 35 : 26 ] I love your commandments. Or turning towards the end of the psalm. Have a look at verse 162. 162. I rejoice. That's a joy word, isn't it?

I rejoice at your word, like one who finds great spoil. 165. Great peace have those who love your law. Verse 174.

Your law is my delight. These words, love, rejoicing, peace, delight. This is the vivid, authentic experience of the believer.

But simultaneously, he suffers great sorrow of heart, scorn and contempt, and the plotting of princes. Or look on to verse 25. My soul clings to the dust.

Dusty. That's my middle name. Verse 28. My soul melts away for sorrow. Verse 42. Taunted by enemies.

[ 36 : 26 ] Verse 110. Try that. 110. The wicked have laid a snare for me. And try 136. My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.

For simultaneous joy and sorrow being experienced by this believer. We tend to entertain a kind of fantasy that our life, at some future point, is going to be free from all sorrow.

It's going to be a golden, blessed life. Once we've sorted out various things, our problems at work, our financial difficulties, our health problems, our family problems.

But it's never going to be like that in this world. It's the world to come that is free of all pain and sorrow and tears and death. Not this world. People sometimes say, but shouldn't the Christian life be a life of pure joy?

Of course not. You would need the skin of a rhinoceros to be untroubled in a world like this. How can we look around at the sorrows of the world and be untouched by them?

[ 37 : 35 ] How can we be aware of the sorrows of the church and then say we have nothing but joy in our hearts? Think of it. Faithful, Bible-believing churches around the world are persecuted and hard-pressed.

In other parts of the world, especially the old world, churches are turning away from the Bible and kowtowing to the pressures of godless society. If a person looks at these things and then says, oh, I have nothing but joy in my heart, that person is heartless.

Think of Jesus, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And yet in the Gospels, he speaks of the joy that fills his heart. Think of the Apostle Paul writing in 2 Corinthians about himself and the other apostles.

We are unknown and yet well-known, dying, and behold, we live, punished and yet not killed, sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.

Poor, yet making many rich, having nothing, yet possessing everything. That surely is the Christian life. That's the life of the author of Psalm 119.

[ 38 : 48 ] That's the reality. Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. In the world to come, there will be unalloyed joy, joy unspeakable and full of glory.

But not yet, not yet. In the meantime, in this world, to go back to our psalm, we will face scorn and contempt and the plotting of princes.

But these things can be endured with great joy in our hearts because, in the words of verse 24, our counselors are not the strident voices of the godless world, but God's testimonies, which are our delight.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Dear God, our Father, we thank you for this man who wrote Psalm 119.

We thank you that he was prepared and able to wear his heart on his sleeve. A heart full of joy and a heart full of sorrow at the same time. And we pray that you will give us grace and strength to endure even when we're at the sharp end of scorn and contempt.

[ 40 : 02 ] And we pray that you will help us so to love your law that we learn more and more to take delight in it, to recognize that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

And we pray, therefore, that you will strengthen us and use us to draw many to Christ. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.