

Steady My Steps
Tim Becker
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1. Introduction

Have you ever wanted to be an iron worker? Take a look at this **photograph up on the screen**. These are the tradesmen who erect the structural steel framework of tall buildings. These buildings are made up of vertical columns sunk deep into the ground. How do you make a building out of that? Well you attach horizontal steel beams to those columns to make a floor of the building. Then above that you attach more horizontal beams to make another floor, and keep doing that for all the floors of a building. If the building is One World Trade Center in NYC, then the building is real tall, the top floor is over 1300 feet in the air. How do those horizontal beams get attached to the columns for the top floors? This is what iron workers do. They climb the columns and walk the beams, inserting heavy bolts into holes in the beams and columns, to connect it all together.

Imagine walking on a beam that is 8 inches wide, hundreds of feet in the air. This is dangerous work. When the iron worker trade was first beginning in the early 1900's, the mortality rate of these men was the highest of all the trades. An iron worker would be fortunate to last 10 years without a serious injury or death. Today these workers use fall harnesses to improve their safety, but even so this occupation remains one of the most dangerous. For these workers, their life depends on careful steady steps.

Probably none of us are iron workers. But do we need steady steps? This depends on what we mean by steady steps, right? A truck driver with a big load heading 60 mph down the interstate around Chicago needs steady steps. Do you know what I mean? He needs to remain alert, ready to respond almost instantaneously to that red brake light that just came on a few car lengths ahead. The head of a large corporation needs steady steps: many jobs are at stake. A father with a teenage son and daughter needs steady steps. There is much to argue about in their home, but dad needs to keep his eye on the most important things and use his words carefully, if he wants to be used by God to instruct his children in God's ways.

Living the Christian life requires steady steps, whether you are a truck driver or a business owner or a dad ... or a 1st grader or a wife or a single adult. Are you aware of your need for steady steps? I'm praying that you will become more aware this morning. The writer of Psalm 119 knew that he needed steady steps. Please turn to Psalm 119:133 in your Bible to read how he put it. This is on p. 515 in the pew Bible.

Psalm 119:133 ¹³³ Keep steady my steps according to your promise, and let no iniquity get dominion over me.

What does the writer of Psalm 119 mean by steady steps? What happens if we don't have steady steps? How do we get the steady steps we need for life?

Please pray with me asking God to help us answer these questions.

* Pray

2. What does the writer of Psalm 119 mean by steady steps?

To begin, let's make a few observations about this verse. First, notice that this verse is talking to someone, to God. It is a prayer, a plea to God to do something. Whatever "keep steady my steps" means, it is not something the writer thinks he can do by himself. He knows he needs God's help.

Second, notice the phrase at the end of the first part "according to your promise." Other English translations say "according to your word" or "in your word" or "by your word." The Hebrew does not translate to just one English phrase; all of these translations are faithful translations of the Hebrew. The Hebrew is somewhat ambiguous.

So what does "keep steady my steps according to your promise" mean? It could mean, "according to your promise, keep steady my steps." Or it could mean, "keep steady my steps so they follow (according to) your word." Or it could mean, "by the power of your word, keep steady my steps."

As I said, the Hebrew is ambiguous. Yet, God chose this Hebrew wording. The words he chose allow all these meanings. And all these meanings are affirmed in Psalm 119 in other places, so they all seem valid. So allow me to give you a non-inspired, but a true-to-the-sense translation.

According to your promise and by the power of your word, keep steady my steps so they follow your word. [repeat]

For a third observation on this verse, notice that this verse has 2 parts: "Keep steady my steps according to your promise" and "let no iniquity get dominion over me." Let's look at the second half. This half too is a prayer to God. "Don't let this happen to me, God. Don't let sin rule over me." Do you remember Cain and Abel? Just after God rejected Cain's offering, God told him,

Gen 4:6-7 : "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

Cain was angry that God did not accept his offering. And in his anger, sin was crouching at the door waiting to pounce on him. Sin desired to rule over Cain. When sin rules a man, what does the man do? Whatever sin wants! What did Cain do? He killed his brother, Abel. Sin pounced on Cain. Sin ruled Cain. Cain did what sin wanted and killed his brother. When sin has dominion over a man, the man always does sin's bidding.

The writer of Psalm 119 is afraid of this happening to him. He doesn't want sin to rule over him. So he prays, "O God, let not iniquity get dominion over me."

These 2 parts of v. 133 go together. The second half helps explain the first half. So now we can add to our answer of the question, what does the writer of Psalm 119 mean by steady steps? He means to keep me from sin's control and to keep me following God's word.

Psalm 119:133 Paraphrase: According to your promise and by the power of your word, keep steady my steps so they follow your word and and so they keep me from sin's control. [repeat]

3. We need steady steps. What happens if we don't have steady steps?

Keep looking at that expanded paraphrase of Ps 119:133 on the screen. Could you make that your prayer? Is there a part of you where you want to ask God to keep steady your steps and keep you from sin's control?

What happens if we don't have steady steps? From the verse, if we don't steady steps, then sin controls us, it rules us. If sin rules us, we obey it. We sin. And sin. And sin.

Where does that land us? Awana kids and adults, fill in the missing word for me from Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is ... what? Death." This means that our sin earns for us, like a wage, forever punishment from God. Hell is truly the nastiest, most painful and most miserable place beyond your imagination. Picture being thrown into a lake of fire. I didn't make that up. Check out Revelation chapter 20.

So what happens if we don't have steady steps? Our verse in Ps 119 says that sin will have dominion over us. And what happens to us if that is true? We will obey sin by sinning. And the wages of sin is death, in the lake of fire, forever.

Are you tempted to think, "Yes, but. Yes, I agree that the wages of sin is death, but you didn't say the 2nd half of the verse: 'but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.'" And are you tempted to then think, "So, as long as I am saved, I don't really need steady steps." Are you tempted to think that you don't need to give any thought to sin having dominion over you if you are saved by Jesus?

Stop for a moment. Can you think of any Bible verse that speaks to Christians telling them to not give any care to the effects of sin in their life? [pause]. I can't either. On the other hand, can you think of any Bible verse that speaks to Christians telling them to indeed take care about the effects of sin in their life? [pause]. Yes. Many. How about: "flee sexual immorality" 1 Cor 6:18, "flee from idolatry" 1 Cor 10:14, "flee youthful passions" 2 Tim 2:22. These first 2 passages were written to a NT church, full of those saved by Jesus. The last was written to Timothy, who Paul calls his child in the faith. These are not written to the unsaved, but to the saved.

Turn with me to Heb 3:12-13, p. 1002 in the pew Bible.

"Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long

as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

This is written to “brothers,” those who are repenting and believing in Jesus. Take care about sin in you. Sin lies. And you might be persuaded by its wily ways. It will harden your heart to the things of God, so your belief may turn to unbelief and lead you to fall away from God.

These verses make it sound as if a person can lose his salvation. Do you see that? Submit your thinking to the Bible now. Never shut off the Bible speaking to you because you don’t like what it says or because it disagrees with what you have been taught before. Always let the Bible have its supreme authority in your thinking. So when you read things in the Bible that seem to contradict other things, dig deeper ... in the Bible.

So, do verses 12 & 13 say that someone who is born again can fall away from the living God? Let’s dig deeper right now. Look with me at the next verse in Heb 3, verse 14. Heb 3:14: “For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.” Let’s define 2 terms. To share in Christ means to personally share in what Christ came to do, to save his people from their sins. To share in Christ means to be a Christian, to be saved, born-again, redeemed by his blood.

To “hold our original confidence firm to the end” means to remain confident in what Christ stands for: to remain confident that you are a sinner worthy of God’s wrath, to remain confident that Jesus gave up his life on a cross to purchase your salvation before God, and to remain confident that God is a treasure above all treasures.

The logic here is odd. Odd or not, let’s let the Bible have its say. Verse 14 is saying: only those who hold their original confidence in Christ firm to the end of their life are born again today. Only those who remain a Christian to the end are a Christian today. This is not saying you earn your Christianity by staying firm to the end, but that you prove your Christianity, reveal your Christianity, by remaining firm in faith to the end. Christian, must you remain firm to the end? Verse 14 says you must. Do you see that?

Now look back at v. 12-13. How do you remain firm in your faith to the end? By taking care that unbelief and sin don’t harden you against God and cause you to fall away. You live to the end of your life fighting against the lies of sin and fighting for belief in God. Who lives way? Here’s who does not live this way. Those who are not in Christ, those who have not been made new by Christ, those who are not truly Christians, don’t live this way. They are care-less, not care-full, about sin and belief. Only those who have come to share in Christ today live this way tomorrow and forever.

What we’ve just been talking about in Heb 3 is what it looks like to have steady steps from Ps 119:133. What if you don’t have steady steps? You will succumb to unbelief and the hardness of sin. You will receive the wages of sin: death.

Do you need to have steady steps? Yes, if you want to hold your original confidence firm to the end. This is what true God followers do. They plead with God and work under God

to have steady steps all life long and so glorify God in life and receive his promised reward in death.

4. How do we get the steady steps we need for life?

Let's go back to Psalm 119:133 now. "Keep steady my steps according to your promise, and let no iniquity get dominion over me." Now to another question: how do we get the steady steps we need for life? We ask God! Once? No, often. How often do you ask for things you want most? A lot!

How does God give us the steady steps to turn from sin and follow him? Do we get his help while we are passive, like a skin patch that you apply once and have the "medicine" needed for steady steps flowing into your soul's blood stream? Or do we get his help while we take an active role, like a table full of food that you eat each day and have the steady steps giving nutrients to your soul?

Much of God's grace to make your life look like Jesus' life (to steady your steps) comes like food at a table that you must eat, rather than a skin patch that does its work without any effort from you. What is the food we must eat? Psalm 119 is full of talk about it. Listen as I read.

- Psalm 119:105 ¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.
- Psalm 119:11 ¹¹ I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

Do you hear it? What is the food that we must eat if we are to live a life of steady faithful steps in godliness? The food is the word of God!

In this psalm, the writer uses many different terms for God's word: law, ways, commandments, statutes, testimonies, rules. Think about this as I read some more verses from Ps 119.

- Psalm 119:29 ²⁹ Put false ways far from me and graciously teach me your law!
- Psalm 119:37 ³⁷ Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.
- Psalm 119:112 ¹¹² I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end.
- Psalm 119:135 ¹³⁵ Make your face shine upon your servant, and teach me your statutes.
- Psalm 119:169 ¹⁶⁹ Let my cry come before you, O LORD; give me understanding according to your word!

Imagine you might pray to God Ps 119:29, "Put false ways far from me and graciously teach me your law!" I hope you will! How do you expect God to graciously teach you his law? God has written it down for you, the Bible. And he expects that you will read and study and memorize it. Would it be right for you to respond to him saying, "God, I asked you to teach it to me, not for me to have to do all the work of learning it myself." If you

are doing the reading of God's word, then are you teaching yourself or is God teaching you?

Imagine an outstanding high school senior football player is being recruited by my alma mater, Penn State. I know, you can't imagine it because it isn't your alma mater or not your favorite college team, but play along. And imagine this is back in the day of Joe Paterno. Can't you imagine Joe on a recruiting trip sitting in the boy's living room? He looks that young man in the eye and saying something like, "If you join our program, we'll make a great football player out of you." Now how is that going to happen? If the student comes to State College and he has to eat the food provided for the players to gain strength, if he has to spend hours each week in the weight room, if he has to work most every day on the practice field with his coaches until he is exhausted, would he be right in saying to Joe Paterno, "I thought you promised me that you were going to make a great football player out of me. But I'm doing all the work, you are doing nothing. You're not keeping your promise." He'd be a self-centered fool to think that. Joe is keeping his promise: he provided the right meals and weight training and coaching staff for this young man to become a great player.

In the same way, God provides for us his word: like a meal plan, a weight room, and a coaching staff. We'd be a self-centered fool to think God wasn't answering our prayer to keep steady our steps and to keep sin from ruling over us. And we would be foolish to think we could "hold our original confidence firm to the end" without taking in the word God provides for us. God's word is of far greater value than a great college football training program.

5. What can we do to benefit from his step steadying word? Tips for life.

I know that many of you would like to have more intake from God's word, but you have struggles with it. Do any of these apply to you as you have tried to read the Bible regularly? "I don't remember what I read." Or, "I don't understand what I read." Or, "I don't feel helped when I read. I'm not encouraged. I don't know how to apply what I just read."

Let me give you a few tips to help your Bible reading so it profits your soul and steadies your steps.

* **Tip One: Think More**

The first tip is that you must think about what you are reading as you are reading it. Some believe that the words themselves have power apart from our understanding of them. This isn't true. God's word must travel through your head before it can help your life. Merely reading, while thinking about something else, will not help you. Listening to an audio Bible while you do something else won't bring any help from God to you unless you can think it through as you are listening. You are not reading the Bible just to say you got the job done, you are reading to understand.

So to think while you read, you must ask questions. You must ask yourself, what does that word or phrase mean? For example, Eph 2:8a says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith.” Let me think through this aloud so you can see what I mean. I read it, “For by grace you have been saved through faith.” And then I stop and start thinking ... What does saved mean here, saved from what? I know from other Bible reading that I sin against God and that he is rightly and justly angry with me because of that. I know that he promises to punish in hell all who sin against him. Only God can save me from the hell that I deserve. Grace means undeserved favor. He saved me from hell by giving me his favor even though I did nothing to deserve it. Faith is a trusting in something: a parent to take care of me or a bank to keep my savings safe. To put my faith in God means to trust him to save me from hell, just because he has decided to be kind to me, not because I earned his kindness.

Now you don’t need to pause and think about half a verse like this with everything you read in the Bible. But to the degree that you skip right by without thinking, you will get less out of it. When you read without thinking, you will remember less of what you read, understand less of what you read, and not sense any help with what you read.

Could you do what I did above ... if you made the effort? I think many of you could. It just might dramatically increase your profit from the Scriptures. It might be better for you to read less in a sitting, but think about it more. Don’t you see?

I’ve been spending some of my 2015 Bible reading time doing this. Let me tell you how. I got a journal (a notebook or loose paper or a computer would all work fine). I started with the book of Titus because it isn’t so big as to overwhelm me, just 3 chapters. I wrote down the first verse and then underneath wrote what I thought the verse was all about. When I ran out of things to write, I moved on to the 2nd verse and did the same thing.

I both hated and loved how slow it was. The Tim that wants to get things done, hated it. In 15-20 min I might only write about a few verses. I felt like I wasn’t getting the task done very fast. Bad thinking. Over time I began to love how slow it was. I rarely left my morning Bible reading time feeling like I didn’t remember or understand or feel helped by what I read and thought about. God’s word grew more rich and precious to me as I read slower and gave space for my mind to think about it.

* **Tip Two: Order Matters: Observe, Interpret, Apply**

The second tip is that when you think about a passage, the meaning must come from the passage. God really meant something when he wrote out the verses you are reading. He didn’t intend for you to assign just any meaning that comes to your mind.

Start by observing what is really in the passage. For example, let’s look back to the first half of Eph 2:8, “For by grace you have been saved through faith.” Let’s say that we read that quickly and latch onto the word “saved” and ignore “by grace” and “through faith.” So we read “you have been saved” and think, “Wonderful! I have been saved. All my

hard work going to church and trying to be a nice person has paid off. My hard work has saved me.”

Of course this isn’t right. Why did we get it wrong? We wrongly interpreted it because we ignored some of the words in the passage. We failed to observe all that was there. If we had noticed “by grace,” we would have realized that my hard work hasn’t saved me. God’s grace has saved me. And if we had noticed “through faith,” we might have thought, “Do I have faith in God? If not, maybe I’m not one of the people who has been saved.”

Our interpretation flows from our observations. Each passage has one interpretation. The interpretation is what God meant when he wrote this. For Eph 2:8a, the interpretive meaning is something like this, “God’s undeserved grace has saved you as you put your faith in Christ.”

Then our applications flow from the interpretation. A passage can have many applications. For Eph 2:8a, here are some:

- God’s grace is so lavish for saving a sinner like me. I ought to worship him.
- Faith in Christ is vital to my being saved. I need to do all I can to keep my faith healthy.
- I really do have faith in Christ that he died on the cross for my sins and that God has treated me better than I deserve. God really has saved me. I can rest in him.

* **Tip Three: Don’t Stop**

The third tip is don’t stop. Taking in the Bible is like putting a log in a wood stove. When you first throw it in and close the door, the room temperature doesn’t change. It doesn’t get hotter the moment the log goes into the stove. The benefits come in time. The room will surely heat up, even though you can’t tell a difference when you first put the log in. Keep at your Bible reading, week after week, even when most days you don’t think anything is happening. Then look back at 3 or 6 months and I think you’ll see that your soul’s desire for God is heating up.

So these are three tips to help you in your Bible intake. First: think more. Second: order matters: observe, then interpret, then apply. Third: don’t stop.

I want to leave you with a few more quick practical things.

1. For some of you, listening to the Bible being read really is the best way for you to get the words of God into you. You can order CD’s or mp3’s on the Internet. But you can also listen online: look at biblegateway.com and look for their Audio Bibles.
2. Many of us find that we don’t get around to the important things in life without a plan. If a reading plan would be a help to you, do an Internet search for 5x5x5 bible reading plan which is 5 min a day, 5 days a week, so you read the NT in a year. I put a few copies of this on the info desk if that is easier for you. Reading the entire Bible in a year is also

available in various formats online. And I placed some copies on the info desk of a plan to read the entire Bible through in a year by reading 6 days a week.

3. Lastly, memorizing Bible passages isn't as hard as you think. You can memorize a passage a week by spending just a few minutes a day. The benefit is that as you memorize and rehearse it later, you'll find yourself thinking much more about the passage and mining its deep truths. I put some Fighter Verse bookmarks on the info desk that give you a plan to memorize 1 passage a week for the year.

Please come see me if you want to talk more about any of this or ask any questions. I love God's word and I love seeing you get more out of it.

6. Conclusion

In summary, pray to God to give you steady steps in your life. Ask him to do it according to his promise and by the power of his word. Ask him to do it so you can follow his word and keep you from sin's control.

And then dive in to the means God provides as your answer to that prayer. Take in his holy word, food for your soul.