

Psalms 17:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.

Analysis

Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not. Having declared his integrity (verses 1-4), David now acknowledges his dependence on divine help to maintain it. The verse presents a paradox central to biblical spirituality: we are responsible to walk righteously, yet we depend entirely on God's enabling power to do so.

"Hold up my goings" (tamokh ashuray, תַּמֹּךְ אֲשֻׁרַי) uses tamak, meaning to grasp, take hold of, support, or sustain. David's "goings" or steps require divine support to remain steady. This is not occasional help in extraordinary circumstances but continual sustaining of daily walk. The verb suggests God's active, ongoing involvement in maintaining the believer's path.

"In thy paths" (bema'gelotekha, בְּמַעְלֹתֶיךָ) specifies where David seeks to walk. Ma'gelot means tracks, paths, or courses—the ways God has marked out. These are not human inventions or preferences but divinely established routes. Walking in God's paths means following His revealed will, His commandments, His way of righteousness. David's concern is not merely moral improvement but covenant faithfulness—staying in the way God has prescribed.

"That my footsteps slip not" (bal-namotu fe'amay, בַּל-נָמוּטוּ פִּעְמֹתַי) expresses the purpose of divine support. Mot means to totter, shake, slip, or fall. David fears not merely catastrophic failure but any deviation from the path. The negative particle bal ("not") expresses determination: "let my steps not slip." This vigilance against even small spiritual slips reflects understanding that great falls often begin with minor compromises.

Historical Context

The imagery of walking paths and avoiding slipping pervades wisdom literature and the Psalms. Proverbs 4:26-27 commands: "Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil." The righteous person's steps are ordered by the LORD (Psalm 37:23), while the wicked stumble in darkness (Proverbs 4:19).

Ancient Palestine's mountainous terrain made the image of slipping particularly vivid. Pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem navigated steep, rocky paths where a misstep could prove fatal. The psalm of ascents declares: "He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber" (Psalm 121:3). Physical danger illustrated spiritual reality: we need divine keeping or we will fall.

David's repeated experience of danger—fleeing through wilderness, hiding in caves, navigating treacherous politics—gave him intimate knowledge of needing divine guidance and support. His request was not theoretical but born from experience: without God holding him up, he would have fallen long ago. This verse became a model prayer for believers who recognize both their responsibility to walk righteously and their absolute dependence on grace to do so.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does this verse balance human responsibility (walking in God's paths) with divine enablement (God holding up our steps)?
2. What are the 'paths' God has established for believers to walk in?
3. Why is prayer against even small spiritual 'slips' important?
4. When have you experienced God 'holding up' your steps when you otherwise would have fallen?

Interlinear Text

חַמּוּ	אֶשְׁרֵי	בְּמַעְגְּלוֹתַי	בִּל	נָמ וְטוּ	כְּעֵמִי:
Hold up	my goings	in thy paths	H1077	slip	that my footsteps
H8551	H838	H4570		H4131	H6471

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 44:18 (Parallel theme): Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way;

Psalms 119:133 (Parallel theme): Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.

Psalms 18:36 (Parallel theme): Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip.

Psalms 121:3 (Parallel theme): He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.

1 Samuel 2:9 (Parallel theme): He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail.

Psalms 121:7 (Parallel theme): The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.

Psalms 38:16 (Parallel theme): For I said, Hear me, lest otherwise they should rejoice over me: when my foot slippeth, they magnify themselves against me.

Psalms 94:18 (Parallel theme): When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O LORD, held me up.

Job 23:11 (Parallel theme): My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined.

Jeremiah 10:23 (Parallel theme): O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.