

## **Biblical Hope and Help for our Darkest and Lowest Times (Psalm 119:81-88)**

*Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on December 28, 2008*

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Our study today brings us to the halfway point of this Psalm, verses 81-88, the eleventh stanza out of twenty-two stanzas in this long and amazing tribute to Scripture, which has one stanza for each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. I have been calling this Psalm the Grand Canyon of Scripture, and as we continue to descend, this section is the lowest point we have seen so far in the emotions of the original writer. At the very middle of this chapter, he is in the midst of the lowest part of the darkest valley in his journey through this canyon. How the Lord got him through and brought him back to the light and to begin ascending again on the other side, how this believer was sustained by hope and help for his faith in the lowest and darkest times of life -- I trust will encourage us through whatever God has for us this next year and beyond.

**Psalm 119:81-88 (NASB95)** <sup>81</sup> My soul languishes for Your salvation; I wait for Your word. <sup>82</sup> My eyes fail *with longing* for Your word, While I say, “When will You comfort me?” <sup>83</sup> Though I have become like a wineskin in the smoke, I do not forget Your statutes. <sup>84</sup> How many are the days of Your servant? When will You execute judgment on those who persecute me? <sup>85</sup> The arrogant have dug pits for me, *Men* who are not in accord with Your law. <sup>86</sup> All Your commandments are faithful; They have persecuted me with a lie; help me! <sup>87</sup> They almost destroyed me on earth, But as for me, I did not forsake Your precepts. <sup>88</sup> Revive me according to Your lovingkindness, So that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth.

The heading of this section in your Bible is the word *Kaph*, that is the letter of the Hebrew alphabet that each verse begins with in this Hebrew poetic acrostic. Some of the writers from many centuries ago believed ‘that for the ancients there was often significance in the shape of the Hebrew letters ... *Kaph* is a curved letter, similar to a half circle, and it was often thought of as a hand held out to receive some gift or blessing. Here the author is in need, and he knows that the only one who can answer his need is God [so] he holds out his hand toward him as a supplicant. That is all any of us can do. We can hold out empty hands. If we hold out hands filled with our own good works [and self-centered treasures], there is no way God can fill them. But if we hold out empty hands, God will fill them, to the praise of the glory of His great grace.’<sup>1</sup>

### **Biblical Hope in Our Darkest Times (v. 81-83)**

The word “hope” comes at the end of v. 81 (“hope” or “wait” depending on your translation) and this hope is what carries him in verses 81-83. Believers may feel helpless at times, but they should never feel hopeless. We are not like the rest of the world, who have no hope in times of great darkness and difficulty. But believers *do experience* dark and discouraging times, as this passage testifies.

Under this first point, there will be two sub-points that sum up verses 81-83. The first I want to draw your attention to is:

#### ***The Darkness He Struggles In***

The first two words “my soul” in v. 81 alert us that this is a spiritual struggle. The word *nephesh* speaks of the self or it’s often translated “person,” referring most commonly to the entire inner person, sometimes translated as *heart* or *mind* or simply *life*.

This struggle is a dark inward soul struggle in these first 3 verses, and in vs. 84-88 we will see his outward struggle as well towards others. In those verses the persecution and threat is physical and literal, while in verses 81-83 it is spiritual, but just as real. Both inner man and outer man struggle in “this present darkness,” as Frank Peretti might say. In the first half our text, the first half of each verse shows one struggling in “the depths of despair” as Anne Shirley might say, or in “the slough of despond” as John Bunyan might say, or as a boxing announcer might say, he’s been knocked down, but not knocked out. His eyes are hurting in v. 82, but still looking for victory, not ready to throw the towel in. And in v. 81 his soul is hurting but still hoping in God’s Word and salvation.

Verse 81 says “my soul languishes” or your Bible may say “faints” (NKJV) or “faints with longing” (NIV) or one translation (*NET Bible*) has “desperately longs for” with the footnote: lit. *my soul pines for*. He’s longing or languishing to the point of fainting or blacking out, and that same Heb. root word begins verse 82 and 87.

v. 82 “my eyes fail *with longing*” (same root as the languishing or fainting in v. 81), or your Bible may say “*with searching*” (NKJV), or “grow weary” (HCSB), or “grow tired” (NET). A similar idea:

Lamentations 2:11 (NASB95) <sup>11</sup> **My eyes fail because of tears, My spirit is greatly troubled; My heart is poured out** on the earth Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, When little ones and infants **faint** ...

*NET Bible Notes* says the writer of Psalm 119 ‘has intently kept his eyes open, looking for God to intervene, but now his eyes are watery and bloodshot, impairing his vision.’

In verse 83, the metaphor now includes smoke, which also makes it hard to see. When will this smoke of v. 83 clear? Look at the text – he’s like a bottle in the smoke (don’t think glass, back then they used animal skins). We might not use the exact same expression today, but in our vernacular we might say he feels hung out to dry, he’s got smoke in his eyes, feeling the heat rising, in a fiery trial.

The expression of v. 83 has been summed up as his thinking that ‘Everything had gone against him. He was in the thick of the battle. There was a haze about him, like smoke rising from a smouldering fire. He could not see or think clearly. He appeared to be in the midst of the conflict, so that he considered that he was hanging above the fire, and likened himself unto a bottle in the smoke. His face was lined, his skin was wrinkled and shriveled, his countenance was blackened by the soot; he had about reached the place of [dark] despair.’<sup>2</sup>

This is the darkest part of this journey through the Grand Canyon of Psalms, as I said before. The shadows are looming in the valley depths and he cannot see the sun. It is now night in the middle of this psalm, *midnight* spiritually-speaking, and the canyon walls around him obscure his vision of the heavens, and clouds obscure his view of the moon and stars, and clouds bring rain and storms. So in the cold and dark of the night he builds a fire, but no matter where he sits around the fire the smoke keeps going in his face (I seem to have that talent around campfires, too, wherever I move the smoke keeps following me).

Now he really can't see, to add insult to injury, to add despondency to discouragement. He feels like the guy in a dark tunnel, who at last sees the light at the end of the tunnel ... only to realize it's the light of an oncoming train.

This is the type of darkness this man is struggling in and lamenting of. From a pessimistic or even merely human viewpoint, this is a desperate and discouraging strait. Spurgeon sums up his emotional state as 'weary with waiting, faint with watching, sick with urgent need ... [he goes on to expound the imagery of v. 83:] 'The skins used for containing wine, when emptied, were hung up in the tent, and when the place reeked with smoke the skins grew black and soot[-covered], and in the heat they became wrinkled and worn.

The Psalmist's face through sorrow had become dark and dismal, furrowed and lined; indeed, his whole body had so sympathized with his sorrowing mind as to have lost its natural moisture, and to have become like a skin dried and tanned. His character had been smoked with slander [cf. v. 86], and his mind parched with persecution [v. 84-85]; he was half afraid that he would become useless and incapable through so much mental suffering, and that men would look upon him as an old worn out skin bottle [like Jesus said you wouldn't use for wine, old wineskins] hold nothing and answer no purpose. What a metaphor for a man to use who was certainly a poet, a divine, and a master in Israel, if not a king, and a man after God's own heart! It is little wonder if we, common [people], are made to think very little of ourselves, and are filled with distress of mind. Some of us know the inner meaning of this simile, for we, too, have felt ... worthless, only fit to be cast away. Very black and hot has been the smoke which has enveloped us ... and it had a clinging power which made the soot of it fasten upon us and blacken us with miserable thoughts ...

[but thankfully v. 83 doesn't end there, he says he does not forget God and His Word. To borrow the words of one hymn: *when through fiery trials my pathway shall lie, God's grace all-sufficient shall be my supply, the flame shall not hurt me, God only designs the dross to consume and the gold to refine.* He continues]

... Blackened the man of God might be by falsehood, but the truth was in him, and he never gave it up ... The worst circumstances cannot destroy the true believer's hold upon his God. Grace is a living power which survives that which would suffocate all other forms of existence. Fire cannot consume it, and smoke cannot smother it ... all his comfort may be dried out of him, and yet he may hold fast his integrity and glorify his God ... [No wonder] that in such a case the eyes ... tormented with the smoke cry out for the Lord's delivering hand, and the heart heated and faint longs for the divine salvation.<sup>3</sup>

*This leads to the second part of these verses, from the darkness he struggles in, now to*

***The Deliverance He Seeks***

<sup>81</sup> ***My soul languishes for Your salvation***

The word for "salvation" here has the sense of deliverance, and is typically used in the context of military conflict. This is fitting, because the Christian life is not a playground, but a battleground. It's also significant that this salvation / deliverance / victory usually was not obtained through human means (Ps. 33:17; Ps. 108:12; Ps. 146:3; Prov. 21:31), and that's true spiritually as well.

Notice in v. 81 that this salvation, this victory over languishing despair will only come by the hope-producing Word

v. 81 (NKJV) “My soul faints for your **salvation**, but I **hope** in Your **Word**”

The words “hope” and “salvation” and the “Word” are also used in battle imagery of a soldier withstanding by the full armor of God. 1 Thessalonians 5:8 speaks of putting on “as a helmet, **the hope of salvation**,” and Ephesians 6:17 says it this way: “take **THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword** of the Spirit, which is **the word of God**.”

Christians of every age have found deliverance from darkness in the Sword of Scripture. One preacher tells of ‘a missionary to Korea, Harold Vokel, recounting his work among prisoners of war during the conflict there. He saw thousands of these young men come to Christ. As they were disciplined in the internment camps, one book of the Bible drew them without fail. It was the Book of Revelation, which some memorized in its entirety. Why so? This book is for the suffering church. In the midst of war and loss, its pages gave them comfort and hope. The final victory belonged to the Lamb who became a Lion. As these prisoners fainted for God’s salvation, they continued to hope in His Word<sup>4</sup> like Psalm 119:81.

Romans 8:24 (NASB95)<sup>24</sup> For **in hope we have been saved**, but **hope that is seen is not hope**; for who hopes for what he *already* sees?

Psalm 130 helps us understand this biblical word “hope” which is parallel with “wait” (sometimes translated that way or used interchangeably). This word for *hope* is not *wishing* (like *hope* in English) but *waiting* in faith not by sight.

<sup>1</sup> Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD ... <sup>5</sup> I **wait for** the LORD, **my soul does wait**, And in His word do I **hope**. <sup>6</sup> My soul *waits* for the Lord **More than the watchmen for the morning**; *Indeed, more than* the watchmen for the morning. <sup>7</sup> O Israel, **hope in the LORD**

**Ps 27:13-14** *I would have despaired* [KJV *fainted*] unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the LORD.

Hebrews 6:11-19 (NASB95)<sup>11</sup> And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the **full assurance of hope** until the end,<sup>12</sup> so that you will not be **sluggish [biblical hope is not a lazy or lackadaisical thing, but it says we are to be]** imitators of those who **through faith and patience** inherit the promises [**full assurance of hope involves faith and patience, not doubting God will do what He said, but also not demanding He do it now. It is waiting patiently**].<sup>13</sup> For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,<sup>14</sup> saying, “I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU.”<sup>15</sup> And so, **having patiently waited**, he [Abraham] obtained the promise ...

The illustration Hebrews gives so we might have full assurance of hope is the patient waiting, the trusting of Abraham in what God promised, even though he could not see it yet and from a human standpoint it was hard to see how it could take place. He still trusted and waited patiently for God’s fulfillment. *That’s biblical hope*. There’s no question God will fulfill His promise, it’s only a question of when for us. The confidence of this hope is not based on us or what’s going on around us, it’s all on the character of God

<sup>18</sup> ... **it is impossible for God to lie** [so] we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement **to take hold of the hope set before us**. <sup>19</sup> **This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast** ...

This hope in the Word of a God who cannot lie is our soul's anchor in even life's darkest storms. Our man of God in Psalm 119 may be in the darkest valley in the darkest night, but his vision still catches glimpses of stars and knows they are there even in moments when he can't see them, he knows they're behind the clouds and they are his navigation system like ancient sailors. His compass is the Word of God, and as long as he looks there and looks heavenward toward the divine author of Scripture, these shining stars of divine faithfulness give hope and promise of light in the dawn to come.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 4, another text like our text in Psalm 119 that shows that in the darkest times, Christ and His Word sustain us. It gives God great glory when weak vessels like us rely on His power. The greatest believers have experienced the greatest trials and difficulties and have endured by the greatness of God's grace and God's word for God's great glory. This was true of great believers like the writer of Psalm 119 and also like the Apostle Paul:

2 Corinthians 4 (NASB95) <sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have this ministry, **as we received mercy, we do not lose heart** [rather than give up hope in our weakness and darkness, God's great mercy gives us hope] ...

<sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Light shall shine **out of darkness**," [that's been His specialty since Genesis 1, light from darkness] is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of **the glory of God** in the face of Christ. <sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in earthen vessels [we are weak and imperfect carriers for this great glory], **so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves**; <sup>8</sup> we are afflicted in every way, **but not crushed**; perplexed, **but not despairing**; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, **but not forsaken**; struck down, **but not destroyed**; <sup>10</sup> ... [end of v. 10] **so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body ... [end of v. 11] in our mortal flesh ...**

<sup>15</sup> For all things *are* for your sakes, **so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God**. <sup>16</sup> Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For momentary, light affliction is **producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison**, <sup>18</sup> while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

This is the eternity-focused God-glorifying darkness-overcoming faith worldview of our passage in Psalm 119. When the man or woman of God is in much difficulty and much darkness, and is still able to make much of the Lord he hopes in, he receives much grace, and God receives much glory. But we must remember that Biblical hope is not grounded in the things that are seen around us, or our circumstances perceived by our natural eyes or fluctuating emotions. Biblical hope is, as another Scripture speaks of, by living on the God that is invisible.

This is the truth that kept John Bunyan from losing heart many years ago when he was in prison for preaching the gospel, and separated from his poor family and wife and children, one of whom could not see at all, she was blind. It was those years in Bedford Jail that he wrote a little book called *Pilgrim's Progress*. He couldn't see at the time in the darkness of his cell what God was doing, but the God who specializes in bringing light from the darkness was using that time for Bunyan to write the most published and most read and most influential Christian book and story perhaps of all time besides the Bible itself (see the article by John Piper in the footnotes).<sup>5</sup>

Ps 119:82 reminds us not to rely on what our eyes can see. God's comfort will come, this man knows, but he doesn't know when. So he prays for, hopes of, trusts in, looks for, longs to see it. His eyes may fail, as he says in the verse, but his faith must not. His walk is by faith, not by sight, and this is instructive for us to see as well.

Don't be discouraged by what you see or fail to see with your eyes. Don't despair at the present appearances, or the forecast of others, or your feelings within. The sunshine is behind the cloud. Behind a seemingly frowning Providence God hides a smiling face.

In the early 17th century Samuel Rutherford said, "Believe under a cloud, and wait for him when there is no moonlight nor starlight."<sup>6</sup>

Spurgeon said: "Blessed are the eyes that are strained in looking after God. The eyes of the Lord will see to it that such eyes do not actually fail. How much better to watch for the Lord with aching eyes than to have them sparkling at the glitter of vanity."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Though I have become like a wineskin in the smoke, **I do not forget Your statutes.** [the heat of life may *drain us*, but God's Word *sustains us*]

At a time when some might feel tempted to think God has forgotten them, this believer is determined not to forget God or His Word. If you feel spiritually dry and lifeless and like a smoke-darkened shriveled wineskin, not desirable or beautiful, take heart:

Isaiah 53:2-3 (NKJV) described our Savior Himself "as a root out of **dry ground**. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, *There is no beauty* that we should desire Him. He is despised and **rejected by men [like an old wineskin]**, A Man of sorrows and **acquainted with grief [knows suffering]**

John Calvin I think captures the sense when he says the "bottle in the smoke" image of v. 83 means feeling 'parched by the continual heat of adversities ... sorrow must have been intense which reduced him to such a state of wretchedness and emaciation, that like a shriveled bottle [skin] he was almost dried up. It, however, appears that he intends to point out, not only the severity of his affliction, but also its lingering nature that he was tormented, as it were, at a slow fire; even as the smoke which proceeds from heat dries bladders by slow degrees. The prophet experienced a long series of griefs, which might have consumed him a hundred times, and that, by their protracted and lingering nature, had he not been sustained by the word of God. In short, it is a genuine evidence of true godliness, when, although plunged into the deepest afflictions, we yet cease not to submit ourselves to God."<sup>8</sup>

*How is God glorified when we trust Him in hope in times like this of fiery trials, when we're languishing, fading, almost fainting, even mourning at times awaiting God's comfort and deliverance?*

Isaiah 24:4-15 (KJV) <sup>4</sup> The earth mourneth *and* fadeth away, the world **languisheth** *and* fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do **languish** ... <sup>13</sup> When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people, *there shall be* as the shaking of an olive tree, *and* as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done. <sup>14</sup> They shall lift up their voice, **they shall sing for the majesty of the LORD**, they shall cry aloud from the sea. <sup>15</sup> Wherefore **glorify ye the LORD in the fires**, *even* the name of the LORD God of Israel in the isles of the sea.

Romans 4 says of Abraham: "**In hope against hope he believed** ... Without becoming weak in faith ... with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, **giving glory to God**" (v. 18-20, NASB95)

God is glorified when our hope and faith in him does not waver in the fires of life. Some have done so even in literal fire and smoke.

I've been reading a book called *Foxe Voice of the Martyrs: 33 A.D. to Today*, which updates the classic work by Foxe and records noted martyrs through the year 2007. In the year 1555, it writes of 'Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer [who] had reached pinnacles in their careers. Ridley was the bishop of London and confidant of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. He influenced [the famous] *Book of Common Prayer* ... Latimer, was an extraordinary preacher, an ardent Catholic who converted to Reformation faith ... Latimer advised the intemperate King Henry VIII and flourished under Henry's successor, Edward VI. But Edward died, and Mary Tudor, the daughter of Henry's first wife, took the throne. Now was the time to cleanse England of so-called reformers and restore it to Rome. Nicknamed "Bloody Mary," the new queen arrested Ridley, Latimer, and Cranmer – in all, about three hundred people met death by her decree ... [Ridley and Latimer were burned at the stake together. When the executioners lit the wood] at Ridley's feet, Latimer turned to him and said, "Be of good comfort, Dr. Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England, as I trust shall never be put out."<sup>9</sup>

In man's darkest times, hope in God brings a light that will not go out and can't be put out by smoking, suffering, slaying, even Satan

*That's what Biblical Hope can do in our Darkest Times (v. 81-83)*

***2<sup>nd</sup> half of text: Biblical Help for our Lowest Times (v. 84-88)***

His hope is in light from God, but the darkness still hasn't lifted. It gets lower before better. If you look at vs. 84, you may notice something different than any other verse we've seen in Psalm 119. It's not what he says, but for the first time it's what he *does not* say

For 83 verses, this masterpiece of Hebrew poetry has begun each line with successive letters of the alphabet and intentionally and significantly, each line has contained a different name or synonym for Scripture. But now in verse 84, he is so overwhelmed with the pressure of persecution that he lapses from his pattern and does not mention the Word of God! Many writers agree this is the only verse in the entire psalm without a term or title that may refer directly or indirectly to Scripture. And in the lowest stanza in the middle of this grand canyon or valley, this middle verse is lowest.

Lawson: 'This is the low point of the psalm. This is the basement. This is rock bottom. He has come crashing down and he has hit the floor and he has taken his eyes off of the Word of God ... he now is a man who has let loose of the rope for just a moment ... when we lose our grip on the Word we lose the strength that only God can provide ... he blinks for a moment and loses sight of the Word. How important it is that we never lose our devotion to the Word.'<sup>10</sup>

In this second half of the psalm, there's also two simple sub points

*His Persecutors and Revilers*

*His Prayer and Re-Commitment*

He will recommit Himself to God's Word, but first notice with me:

**His Persecutors and Revilers**

v. 84b "those who persecute me"

v. 85a they "have dug pits for me"

- v. 86b “they have persecuted me with a lie” (reviling)  
 v. 87a “they almost destroyed me on the earth”

His soul is fainting in v. 81, his eyes are failing in v. 82, and the same word *kalah* used in both of those verses appears in v. 87 - “they almost *destroyed* me,” or “they almost *wiped me from the earth*” (NIV), or “they almost *made an end of me*” (NKJV), or “they almost *consumed me*” (KJV). The lions are raging, but God has them on a leash and they can go no further than God permits.

*Kalah* means “come to an end,” “stop,” or “be finished,” even to “vanish away” or “perish.” When we say, “I’m finished,” to mean that we are done in, destroyed, or dying, it is very similar. This word is repeated in our passage, setting the tone for his lament, expressing the dire circumstances he feels. This is not only the low point of the psalm, but expressing the low point of his life. The pressures were spiritual and internal before, here it’s also literal and physical.

We don’t need to spend as much time discussing the persecutors because we will see them often again in Ps 119, but I do want to focus on his prayers and recommitment to God’s Word.

First his prayer:

<sup>84</sup> **How many are the days of Your servant? When will You execute judgment on those who persecute me?**

“How many” may be the force of *how long*, or *how much longer? I don’t know how much more I can endure, how many or how few my days will be before my fleeting life is gone. I’m not asking you if you will intervene, but when will you do it Lord? Soon?*

I can’t help but think of the song the choir sang so beautifully last week that has been in my mind this week, “when will Messiah come?” The Jews for hundreds of years after the close of the Hebrew Scriptures, were longing and looking and languishing and fainting as their eyes strained through the pain to try and seek through the clouds of smoke and suffering, through persecution, through captivity, through oppression by kingdoms and kings, they were hoping and waiting so long for their salvation

Two wonderful but lesser known characters in the Christmas story:

Luke 2:25-38 (NASB95) <sup>25</sup> And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was **Simeon**; and this man was righteous and devout, **looking [or “waiting] for the consolation of Israel**; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. <sup>26</sup> And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. <sup>27</sup> And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when **the parents brought in the child Jesus**, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, <sup>28</sup> then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, <sup>29</sup> **“Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; <sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen Your salvation, <sup>31</sup>** Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup> A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES [that’s **light for us!**], And **the glory of Your people Israel.”** ...

<sup>36</sup> And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with *her* husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup> and then as a widow **to the age of eighty-four**. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. <sup>38</sup> At that very moment she came up and *began* giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to **all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem**.

That's the ultimate and fullest fulfillment of Psalm 119's prayer for consolation, comfort and salvation. In verse 82 he asked when God would deal with His servant as God promises to do, and in verse 84 he asks when God will deal with his enemies as God promises to do as well. When will God judge the wicked? How long, O Lord? Many believers throughout history have been praying for this when puzzled by God's providential purposes and timing.

One writer says this prayer in Ps 119 'voices the ago old perplexity of why God's people suffer while the wicked seem to triumph and prosper. "It just seems like God doesn't care," we sometimes think. "Doesn't He see what's go on? Why doesn't He judge these wicked people who are [hurting good people, God's people]?"

The answer to such questions, however, is really not as perplexing as it seems. First, if we may be so blunt, it is none of our business what God is doing and why. *God is sovereign and does what He does because He is Who He is* ... Ephesians 1:11 doesn't read, "He worketh all things after the counsel of *what pleases us*? Or, "He worketh all things after the counsel of *our understanding*?" Or, "He worketh all things after the counsel of *what makes us feel good*?" No, it reads, He "worketh all things after the counsel of **his own will**" (Eph. 1:11). Second, and this is the comfort He gives us, He will eventually, in His time and purpose, execute judgment on those who have rebelled against Him and persecuted His people.<sup>11</sup>

If we ask in faith and for God's glory, it is not a sin to pray "when will you execute judgment?" We know this because the literal voices of the martyrs in Revelation 6 whose souls are free from their sinful bodies are asking a very similar question of the Lord.

Revelation 6:9-10 (NASB95) <sup>9</sup>When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; <sup>10</sup>and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "**How long, O Lord**, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

God will answer that prayer in His perfect time a few years later:

Revelation 16 (NASB95) <sup>1</sup>Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God." ... [Verse 5] And I heard the angel of the waters saying, "Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; <sup>6</sup>**for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets** ...

<sup>9</sup>Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and **they did not repent so as to give Him glory** [failing to glorify God by repenting will bring wrath one day. Romans 1 also speaks of God's wrath to those who did not glorify God] ...

<sup>17</sup>Then the seventh *angel* poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, "It is done."<sup>18</sup> And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake *was it, and so mighty*. <sup>19</sup>The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. <sup>20</sup>And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. <sup>21</sup>And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe. [rather than repent at God's obvious working, they reject]

Let me say this, my friend, if you have never truly repented so as to give God glory, if you're not living a Christian life, if you are not truly a follower of Christ as your Lord, that passage should frighten you to flee from the wrath to come!

Turn from the sin you love to a Lord whose Love will surpass anything you can desire, a Love that welcomes all *repentant* sinners. As I said last week, that's why Jesus came at Christmas, to glorify God by giving His life in love for us and calling us to give up ourselves and repent and follow Him in love.

But if you do **not** love Christ and His Word, like the writer of Psalm 119, because your heart is not surrendered to the Lord, because you are not His true servant or saint, it will be a terrible and terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God for those who reject Christ's Lordship. You are living on borrowed time as sinners in the hands of an angry God, and in His love He has delayed His fury, but you don't know how long or how many days you have left on this earth. The volcano is not sleeping, the dam will be unleashed, heaven will be opened, and the Lord of Lords will judge eternally all who are not His true disciples.

But if you do love the Lord, you have help and grace from God in even the lowest times. The Scripture says God has not appointed us to wrath, and the trials believers do experience are for our good by a loving Father. Even if we're in the pits like v. 85 ... even if we are persecuted or reviled wrongfully like v. 86... God will help us.

### ***This is the final point: His Prayer and Re-Commitment***

The simple prayer at the end of verse 86 is only two words: "help me." But God doesn't require flowery words, we don't have to pray in King James English, we don't need to impress with our words – God sees our heart and grants prayers that are simple if sincere. Some times the shortest and urgent ones are most sincere. "Lord, *help me*" a Canaanite woman said to Jesus (Mt 15:25) and he commended her for her great faith.

What a great short prayer for us to pray throughout our days! "Help me" as a silent constant prayer before everything we do tomorrow and this week, big or small. We need help not only in our lowest times, but all the time. We ask in faith for help, and if our faith is weak, we can pray like one said to Jesus, "I believe, Lord help my unbelief."

Another great short prayer we see repeated in Psalm 119 is "revive me" (11x in the chapter) and "teach me" another 11x. Verse 92 has another brief prayer: "save me." Peter cried out these simple words "save me" when he was trying to walk on water, and he began to sink. It wasn't a long prayer, but I can guarantee you it was one his most sincere and earnest and passionate prayers for help in a low time.

*Listen to David's prayer in Psalm 69:* <sup>1</sup> **Save me, O God,** For the waters have threatened my life. <sup>2</sup> I have sunk in deep mire, and there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and a flood overflows me. <sup>3</sup> **I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched; My eyes fail while I wait for my God.** <sup>4</sup> Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; Those who would destroy me are powerful, being wrongfully my enemies ...

<sup>13</sup> But as for me, my prayer is to You, O LORD, **at an acceptable time; O God, in the greatness of Your lovingkindness, Answer me with Your saving truth.** <sup>14</sup> **Deliver me from the mire and do not let me sink; May I be delivered from my foes and from the deep waters.** <sup>15</sup> May the flood of water not overflow me Nor the deep swallow me up, **Nor the pit shut its mouth on me.** <sup>16</sup> Answer me, O LORD, **for Your lovingkindness is good; According to the greatness of Your compassion, turn to me,** <sup>17</sup> And do not hide Your face from **Your servant, For I am in distress; answer me quickly.** <sup>18</sup> Oh draw near to my soul *and redeem it; Ransom me* because of my enemies!

Prayers for help, in desperate dependent faith, honor the Lord as we pray in light of His character and nature, not because of ours. As we close out our study back in Psalm 119, I want you to notice this re-commitment.

His persecutors may have temporarily distracted his focus on God's law in verse 84, but he quickly regains that focus at the end of v. 85, where God's law is more the focus than the lawbreaker.

In verse 86, he recommits and perhaps even reminds himself (and reminds us in the process): "*All Your commandments are faithful.*" The unbelievers in my life are unfaithful, even I can be unfaithful, but God and His Word is always faithful. If we're faithless, He remains faithful. Great is Thy faithfulness, *increase my faithfulness to Thy Word.* I commit to never forsake Your Word (v. 87b).

The world may try to destroy my character or even my life, but by your help I will not let it destroy my delight in God's Word.

Job could say in greatest of fiery trials and suffering: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." We don't have to know what the future holds, but we know the One who holds the future in His hand, and we will seek our hope and help only in His Word.

**v. 87** "But as for me" - The emphatic personal pronoun provides a stark contrast. In spite of the persecution he suffers, the psalmist clings firmly to God's Word. He is determined to persevere in His commitment to the Word.<sup>12</sup> This is what will sustain us as well.

In verse 88, it's "revive me" – quicken me, give me life, preserve my life, reinvigorate the spiritual soul that he described in the first few verses as languishing, failing, dry and blinded by the smoke.

Jim Rosscup says this word has a sense of 'revive with fullness of life or vigor (Pss. 80:18; 85; 119:25, 37, 40, 50, 88, 93, 107, 124, 154, 159). This is in a spiritually refreshing "lift" or "new lease on life." It is a revitalizing of the inner man ... the Lord bringing back or turning the life, which can have wandering (as a sheep) in view. The word "revive" is related more to an enlivening. Jacob's spirit, down in the dumps of discouragement, was "revived" (Gen. 45:27) ... David could confess that God had power in His hand to strengthen (1 Chr. 29:12). Many other scriptures identified the source of rejuvenation with God (Ps. 18:1, 32, 39; 28:7, 8; 29:11; 59:17, 62:7; 84:5; 140:7; Hab. 3:19). The invitation, then, is fitting, "Seek the Lord and His strength, seek His face continually ..."<sup>13</sup>

Charles Bridges urges us to pray for God to revive us when 'spiritual sloth has benumbed us—such backwardness to prayer, and disrelish for heavenly things! These are sins deeply humbling in themselves, and aggravated by the neglect of the plentiful provision laid up in Christ, not only for the life, but for the peace, joy, and strength of the soul. Nothing but indolence or unbelief [hampers or hinders] our supplies. Oh! stir up the prayer for *quicken*ing influence, and we shall be rich and fruitful. Sometimes also self-confidence paralyzes our spiritual energy ...

[our disciplines may] indeed be used with all diligence, but with the fullest conviction that all means, all instruments, all helps of every kind, without the influence of the Spirit of grace, are dead. "It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing." (John 6:63.)

... Do we desire to *keep the testimony of his mouth* [as this last verse 88 says]? Do we mourn over our shortcomings in service? Oh! then, for our own sake, for the Lord's sake, and for the church's and the world's sake, let our petitions be incessant each one for himself—'*Quicken me—* Quicken this slothful heart of mine. Enkindle afresh the sacred spark within, and let me be all alive for thee.'<sup>14</sup>

Give me more life to love you more and live for you more! Is that your prayer? I pray it will be our prayer more, and that we will pray more like this psalm. As verse 88 says, that God would revive us, not because of us but because of God's lovingkindness to undeserving sinners like us in need of grace. And the motive is not "so that life will be free from darkness or lowness" – look at what he says – "so that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth."

No matter what dark times or low times lie ahead, God's life-giving grace will sustain the soul that seeks hope and help in God and His Word and is committed to trust and follow Him no matter what, for God's greatest glory and for our greatest good.

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<sup>1</sup> James Boice, *Psalms*, 3:1009.

<sup>2</sup> Erling Olsen. *Meditation in the Book of Psalms*. Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1939, p. 851.

<sup>3</sup> Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, Hendrickson, n.d., 3:305.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Williams, *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Psalms 73-150*, Vol. 14, p. 363. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1989.

<sup>5</sup> For a wonderful introduction to the life of Bunyan and developing this theme further through his life difficulties, see [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Biographies/1480\\_To\\_Live\\_Upon\\_God\\_that\\_Is\\_Invisible](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Biographies/1480_To_Live_Upon_God_that_Is_Invisible)

<sup>6</sup> *KJV Bible commentary*. 1994. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, p. 1151.

<sup>7</sup> Spurgeon, *Ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> John Calvin. *Commentary on Psalms - Volume 4* (256). Joseph Kreifels.

<sup>9</sup> *Foxe Voices of the Martyrs*, Bridge-Logos, Alachua, Florida, printed in 2007 in China by Codra Enterprises, Inc., p. 130-32.

<sup>10</sup> "Down but not Defeated," preached by Steve Lawson on 12/18/2005, available at [www.cfbcmobile.org](http://www.cfbcmobile.org)

<sup>11</sup> J. D. Watson. The Sufficiency of God's Word - An Exposition of Psalm 119.

<http://www.thescripturealone.com/PS119.html>

<sup>12</sup> William Barrick's notes at [www.drbarrick.org](http://www.drbarrick.org)

<sup>13</sup> James Rosscup. (2008). *An Exposition on Prayer in the Bible: Igniting the Fuel to Flame Our Communication with God* (968). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Bridges, *Psalms 119*, p. 228-229.