

God's Word: A Lifeline in Troubled Times (Part 2)

We all face troubled times, whether materially, physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually. We go through the loss of loved ones, the betrayal of friends, the abandonment of family, the persecution of the ungodly, the sickness of our own bodies. There are moments when we may wonder what God is doing. Didn't He promise to be a blessing in our lives even now? And while we do need to remember that within our New Covenant, God's promise of blessing is truly wrapped up in eternity (cf. **Romans 8:18-25**; **1 Peter 1:3-5**), **Psalm 119** is a great lamp to our feet as we walk the path of struggle and sorrow now.

As we've already learned, perhaps the central statements of the entire psalm are found in **Psalm 119:92-93**: "If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life" (ESV). During this interim between God giving His promises and fulfilling His promises, the psalmist survived because of God's great lifeline: His Word. When we are struggling and suffering, if we are not careful, we will see getting into God's Word as just another burden we have to lift while struggling. But that is not so. God's Word is not the burden, it is the burden lifter. It is the lifeline that God has tossed to us as our sorrows and suffering rise above our heads and threaten to drown us. Let us take hold of it and allow it to pull us to the safety of life in God's fulfilled promises.

But how? How can we rely on God's Word, Law, Promises to lift us up and keep us from sinking in the ocean of our own despair? Obviously, if you really want to see this, you need to read **Psalm 119** again and again and again. Let it fill your heart, soul, and mind with the wonder, safety, and deliverance of God's Word. However, for the sake of this article, consider some principles pulled from the psalm.

First, **Psalm 119:36-37** says: "Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways" (ESV). In times of struggle, we are facing a war of the mind and meditation. We can focus on and grouse about how we aren't getting what we want (selfish gain), we can try to escape to mind-numbing meditations (worthless things), or we can incline our hearts to God's testimonies and ways where we will find life. Let God's Word fill your mind, your meditations, your imaginings, your fantasies, and see how your perspective on suffering changes.

In like manner, **Psalm 119:23** says: "Even though princes sit plotting against me, your servant will meditate on your statutes" (ESV). During suffering, we often pass the time replaying in our minds all that our enemies said and did to us. Or if it is not persecution, we may replay and check off in our minds all that our supposed friends didn't say or didn't do for us. That path simply leads to dark isolation and emptiness. Instead, meditate on God's statutes.

Psalm 119:41-42 provides an interesting response to all that happens to us at the hands of taunters, failed friends, and even Satan's own work against us. "Let your steadfast love come to me, O LORD, your salvation according to your promise; then shall I have an answer for him who taunts me, for I trust in your word" (ESV). The psalmist's point is the answer for our taunters is God's promised salvation. It may not have come through yet, but don't abandon it now because it is the only answer we have. Hang on to His promise. Believe His Word. When He fulfills it, the taunter, the oppressor, the persecutor will then learn why we have lived as we have. If we let go of God, when God fulfills His promise for those who hung on, we'll learn why we should have hung on too.

What is really great is that meditating on God's Law and Word instead of meditating on selfish gain, worthless things, or our enemies threats provides us a great blessing all on its own: "Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me" (**Psalm 119:98**, ESV). Sure, the enemy will mock us and accuse us of folly. But to we who are being delivered by it, we know God's Word is power and wisdom, and it gives us a leg up on the world around us.

Meditating on God's Word provides proper perspective during the times of struggle. As Paul learned that his thorn in the flesh wasn't all bad, but was a messenger of God's grace even as it was a messenger of Satan (cf. **II Corinthians 12:7-10**), the psalmist says, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes" (**Psalm 119:71**, ESV). And then again he says, "I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me" (**Psalm 119:75**, ESV). Look for the good, the lessons, the growth that can come through the suffering. Your eyes will be opened to it through knowledge of God's statutes and meditation on His righteous rules.

Psalm 119:24 gives great direction: "Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors" (ESV). Certainly, the words of friends are helpful and the help from many counselors is good. But the anchor for all of it needs to come from God's Word, not man's wisdom. Too often, in the midst of suffering we will grab hold of any old piece of

advice that seems to provide some immediate escape or pleasure. But that will not provide long term satisfaction or deliverance. That only comes through God's Word. Even if you can't see how God's direction will work in the short term, hang on to it. Let God's Word be your counselor.

Finally, all of this leads us to the great principle of **Psalm 119:50**: "This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives life" (ESV). Satan wants us to believe that in the midst of struggle God has abandoned us and left us for dead. Staying in the lifeline of God's Word reminds us the only place there is life: God's promises. No matter what you suffer, don't let them go. Life is at the end of them.

While this psalm doesn't actually express a resolution to the psalmist's struggle and suffering, it is certain he knew one was coming. The same is true for you. Don't let your suffering cause you to abandon God, His people, or His Word. Hang on and use God's Word as your lifeline to do it. Only then will you win.

—Edwin L. Crozier