

Yodh  
 Psalm 119:73-80  
 ABC 7/8/18

As we continue our study through Psalm 119 we come today to the 10<sup>th</sup> stanza where each vs starts with the Hebrew letter *yodh*. You're familiar with this letter, even if you don't realize it. In Mt 5:18 Jesus says, **truly I say to you, until heaven & earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.** Guess what the **smallest letter** in the Hebrew alphabet is? *Yodh*. Just a little dash of a letter but the *yodh* section of Ps 119 doesn't deal with small or trivial matters. It continues to teach us about affliction. As CS Lewis said, *God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.*<sup>1</sup> I'm sure the author of Ps 119 would agree with that. Sometimes **affliction**, pain, & suffering is God's plan for us. As we saw last week in vs 71, the psalmist saw that his **affliction** was good for him. One of the purposes of **affliction** is to teach us things we'd never learn without it. Until difficult times come, our knowledge of God & His Word tends to be rather theoretical. It's like the guy who reads a couple of books on car engines & then opens a repair shop. I don't know about you, but I'd rather have a mechanic who has some experience & some grease on his hands. The psalmist says the difficult times were good for him because through them he learned more of God's Word. Most of us, understandably, pray to be relieved of afflictions. While that's certainly appropriate – after all, Jesus prayed that His cup of suffering would pass from Him (Mt 26:39) – we don't see the psalmist doing it here. No doubt most of us would avoid affliction if we were in charge. But would our choices be better than God's? Of course not. Just because we may not like suffering doesn't mean we don't need to experience it. When we realize God is sovereign & that He sometimes afflicts us (75), we see things differently. It's not that the affliction becomes less painful. But that when we factor God into the equation we can look & see how it's good for us go through hard times because we learn things there about God & ourselves that we'd never have known otherwise. We learn that God's ways are far beyond our ways, that He is holy & righteous & full of mercy & always faithful. We

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<sup>1</sup> *The Problem of Pain*, p 93

learn that we aren't as strong or wise or holy or as powerful as we thought we were. So instead of simply praying, *get me out of here*, we should also pray as the psalmist did, **teach me good discernment & knowledge (66), teach me Your statutes (68), & it is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes (71)**. Stand & read God's Word to us today, **73-80**. PRAY  
Why is affliction part of God's plan for us? Sometimes we never know, do we? In these 8 vss the psalmist again addresses this. He begins with the fact that...

### **1. God is Our Creator 73**

In *The New City Catechism*, the 4<sup>th</sup> question asks, *How & why did God create us?* The answer is: *God created us male & female in His own image to know Him, love Him, live with Him, & glorify Him. & it is right that we who were created by God should live to His glory.*<sup>2</sup> It would be easy to think the authors of the catechism had this vs in mind, at least in part. God made us & He wants us to know Him, all for His glory.

**A. He Made Us** The psalmist beautifully states, **Your hands have made me & fashioned me**. David says in Ps 139,

**I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully & wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, & my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, & skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; & in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me (14-16).**

God made each of us precisely & specifically the way we are. Nothing was left to chance. The psalmist knew, as should we, that we aren't the product of evolution & blind chance. We are hand-made & hand-crafted by the sovereign God of the universe. We are here on purpose! The author knew that God knows us infinitely better than we know ourselves. To say that God is our Creator is to recognize that ...

- we're obligated to Him as the One who gives life;
- we respect Him as One who is greater & smarter than we are;
- As our Designer, He knows what's best for us, even affliction.

**B. He is our Instructor** Repeatedly throughout Ps 119 God is referred to as our Teacher or Instructor. Here those words aren't used, but the idea's the same. The psalmist prays, **73b**

<sup>2</sup> This can be found at [www.newlifepres.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/New-City-Catechism.pdf](http://www.newlifepres.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/New-City-Catechism.pdf)

This is a great prayer for each of us. What we really need in every circumstance of life is more understanding of God & His purposes. The psalmist prays because he knows he needs God's help. He needs understanding, wisdom, & insight so that he may learn God's **commandments**. God blesses us with teachers within the church. Those of you who teach, we are grateful & thank God for you. God is using you to teach us. But as true as that is, there's no substitute for our heavenly instructor, God Himself. Paul tells us in 1 Cor 2:12-13,

**Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit.**

No matter how much we know, we never outgrow the need for the Holy Spirit to take His Word & give us understanding of it. God made us for a reason. He made us that we might know Him through His Word, by His Spirit.

**2. God Made Us to Trust Him** Vss 74-79 are the heart of this section because they're about the psalmist's affliction. The theme of **affliction** is a reoccurring one (50, 67, 71, 75). The important truth we learn is that affliction may be God's doing. It isn't necessarily a sign of His punishment. It may very well be a sign of His faithfulness. He may be doing it for our good as vs 71 makes crystal clear. So...

**A. Thank God for His Faithfulness When Afflicted** (74-75) The author wants all who fear God to see him with joy as an example of the way to trust in God & His Word. He wanted the open book of his life to be read by others. When we as Christians go through affliction it's meant to grow & teach us. But it's also meant to grow & teach those around us. Your affliction is meant to bless & encourage those around you by the way you respond. The key to the psalmist's hope was God's Word. **I hope in Your word** or **I wait for Your word** (74b). What he's saying is that God's promises were the basis of his hope. Believers watched him grow in his trials by trusting in God's promise & hoping in God's words. As they watched him do this, they were encouraged & rejoiced. When God's faithfulness, lovingkindness, & compassion are seen in his life there will be rejoicing among the people of God. His life, even in affliction, could give encouragement & gladness to others because his hope & attention were on God's Word. Why? **Because I wait for or hope in Your**

**word.** He trusts completely what God has said. Then, **I know, O Lord** (Yahweh), **that Your judgments are righteous.** God always does the right thing, in the right way, & for the right reasons. His ways are never wrong, never incomplete, & never arbitrary. That God's judgments are true & righteous is the constant teaching of Scripture. In Gen 18:25 Abraham asked rhetorically, **Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?** David wrote in Ps 19:9, **The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.** So he writes, **Your judgments are righteous.** Isn't this a wonderful confession? Before he talks about his affliction, what does he say?

*Lord, You are righteous. What I've experienced isn't unjust. What I'm experiencing isn't because You don't care about what I'm going through. My affliction isn't something You've done wrong. It's not a lack of care, of love, of goodness, or of justice. In fact, I know, Your judgments are righteous.*

Do you see what the psalmist is doing? He's justifying God. As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we know that God has justified us. We know we are sinners deserving God's wrath. But God says, *I declare you righteous on the basis of My Son's perfect life, atoning death, & victorious resurrection & your faith in Him!* That's justification. The world sometimes looks at your trials & says, *Your God must not be good.* What do we do at this point? We justify God by saying, *My God is good all the time, even in my affliction!* That's what the psalmist is doing. **68a, 71a, 75**

The psalmist is declaring God to be righteous even in his afflictions. That's what the old hymn, *Whate'er My God Ordains Is Right*, is all about.<sup>3</sup> I'd encourage you to read the whole thing, but here's what the last 2 vss say:

*Whate'er my God ordains is right, though now this cup I'm drinking May bitter seem to my faint heart, I take it all, unshrinking. My God is true each morn anew. Sweet comfort yet shall fill my heart, & pain & sorrow shall depart, sweet comfort yet shall fill my heart.*

*Whate'er my God ordains is right. Here shall my stand be taken. Though sorrow, need, or death be mine, yet I am not forsaken. My Father's care is 'round me there. He holds me that I shall not fall, & so to Him, I leave it all, He holds me that I shall not fall.*

God is righteous & what He does is always right. That's a truth we must know, believe, & hang on to. That's the declaration we must make, even in affliction & trials. The phrase **I know** speaks of settled knowledge, the kind that comes only by knowing God & His character.

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<sup>3</sup> #66 in our hymnal, Samuel Rodigast

Then he says it's **in faithfulness You have afflicted me**. What does this mean? If the affliction was due to the poet's sin, **faithfulness** refers to God's faithfulness to His own righteousness & justice. The Judge of all the earth must punish sin. Yet we have no reason to think of the writer's afflictions in this light, therefore the **faithfulness** mentioned here probably refers to God's **faithfulness** to the psalmist, a proof that God continues to love him & is working to have him grow & mature by means of the affliction. We need to see that ourselves when things aren't going as we would wish. As we all know, *the school of affliction is tough but it provides an excellent education.*<sup>4</sup> The psalmist declares that because of his affliction he knows that everything God says is right. God is faithful even in our troubles. & He's involved in everything that happens to us. This means not only that there's justice in God's action, but an ultimate good purpose behind it as well. When times are tough, it's easy to think, *Lord, this must be a mistake*. But think about how the psalmist puts it: **In faithfulness You have afflicted me**. It's one thing to say, *God has the right to do with me as He pleases*. It's a greater thing to say that His **judgments are righteous, & that in faithfulness He has afflicted me**. Somehow the poet sees beyond his current misery, past the pain of difficult circumstances, & through the fog of unanswered questions to see the hand of a loving & faithful God who is working in, with, & through his troubles to accomplish His divine purposes. This was the place Job eventually came to through his long & desperate struggle. He came to know that the judgments of the Lord were right & understood God's faithfulness in affliction. What a high view of God's sovereignty this is. Even the attacks of the psalmist's enemies can't happen apart from God's gracious permission. Any affliction that comes to him must be allowed to do so, not in spite of God's faithfulness, but because of it. To think like this means you come to the conclusion that God is so sovereign that nothing can happen to you that He hasn't planned for His glory & your ultimate benefit. Some of you remember the Baptist missionaries' airplane that was shot down by the Peruvian Air Force in 2001. Jim & Roni Bowers, along with their son, daughter, & the pilot of the plane were mistaken for drug runners by a CIA plane & the jet from Peru. Without warning, they were fired

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<sup>4</sup> Danny Akin

on, the plane caught fire, but the pilot was able to crash land into a river. Roni & their 7-month old daughter, Charity, were both killed in the shooting. Humanly speaking this was a tragedy that should never have happened. Of the many bullets that hit their small plane, one single bullet took the life of both Roni & Charity but didn't reach the pilot who was just in front of Charity. At the memorial service for his wife & daughter Jim Bowers called it a *sovereign bullet*, meaning it was a bullet that was in the complete control of the God of the universe. He went on to say,

*Humanly speaking, Roni & Charity's death were ... absolutely senseless. Wouldn't you think they should be one of the last ones to be shot to death? You know, that's comforting to me. Some of you might think I'm crazy. I know—I'm learning—that God's ways are sometimes, & even often, inhuman. How could something so terrible be so good? Of course, I could say that now & next month it may be quite different. But I believe the truth: many good things have happened, & many more are to come.<sup>5</sup>*

Only a man who knows God can say a thing like that. But that's exactly the sort of thing the psalmist is saying in vs 75. As he looks at his life, the good times & the bad, the happy days & the sad nights, he knows all that's happened to him isn't by fate or some sort of cosmic game of chance. It's come to him as proof of God's faithfulness to him. Far from shattering his faith, his troubles have strengthened it. The world has no answer for faith that shines the brightest in the darkest hours of the night. Trouble, distress, affliction, pain, & suffering drive those with true faith to a greater dependence on the Lord. That increases their knowledge of Him, which in turn increases their ability to trust Him, which baffles & attracts the world. When we willingly submit our afflictions to our heavenly Father, suffering will be used by Him to mold us more perfectly into the likeness of our Lord & Savior. Therefore, the psalmist could confidently declare, **Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.... It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.... I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are righteous, & that in faithfulness You have afflicted me** (67, 71, 75). Of course, the supreme illustration of God's turning all things, even the most evil of things, to the good of His children is seen in the sacrificial death of His own Son. At the cross of Jesus Christ, God took the most absolute evil that Satan could devise & turned it into the greatest blessing He could offer to fallen mankind—forgiveness, redemption,

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<sup>5</sup> [www.rvbc.cc/ResourceLibrary/Bowers/Bowers.htm](http://www.rvbc.cc/ResourceLibrary/Bowers/Bowers.htm)

new life, & eternal salvation from sin. As you go through tough times, thank God for His faithfulness.

**B. Ask God for His Lovingkindness & Compassion** (76-77) The psalmist has affirmed that all of God's judgments are righteous & it was in faithfulness that He sent afflictions. Still, he needs the Lord's comfort to endure & persevere through these times. So he makes a request: **76**

*Let Your hesed, Your loyal love, Your lovingkindness be the comfort that Your servant needs & trusts & by Your promises You will send.* God's unfailing love caused Him to send afflictions to the psalmist. Therefore, the psalmist can be comforted even while going through them. He'd asked God for understanding concerning his afflictions & God gave it to him; these stanzas are proof. Even so, suffering is bitter & the afflicted needs comfort. The psalmist needed to remember that God loved him in spite of, & even through, what he was suffering. So the psalmist prayed & did so on solid ground, asking on the basis of promises made in God's own Word. Spurgeon comments, *Our prayers are according to the mind of God when they are according to the Word of God.*<sup>6</sup> & so with God's own promises, he asked for lovingkindness in his affliction.

He goes on, **77**

He's asking God for God's own steadfast love & tender mercy to comfort him so he'd have the strength to live through the afflictions that God **in faithfulness** had sent. Notice that the Afflicter is also the Comforter. The poet asks for God's **compassion**. That signifies mercy & mercy is grace shown to those who are undeserving, who deserve the opposite. God is merciful (Ex 34:6-7). Thus, regardless of what we're going through & whether it's the result of our sin & whether we have brought it on ourselves, we can appeal to God's mercy & be assured we'll find it. God knows we need His mercy just to survive. Go to Him. He'll give it to you. As William Plumer says, *If God is our enemy, we be dead men.*<sup>7</sup> **77a**

Then with a word of devotion & commitment to the Lord he adds, **For Your law is my delight**. Even in, especially in, his afflictions his love for God's Word continues. Why? Because there we learn that the same God who chastens also comforts. The One who bruises also blesses. The One who

<sup>6</sup> [www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/treasury-of-david/psalms-119-76.html](http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/treasury-of-david/psalms-119-76.html)

<sup>7</sup> *Studies in the Book of Psalms*, p 1055

brings us down also lifts us up. The one who humbles also exalts. Paul provides a wonderful commentary on this.

Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. & He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor 12:7-10).

John MacArthur concludes his commentary on those vs by saying,

*Having a proper perspective on trouble, trials, and suffering is the cornerstone of Christian living. Focusing all one’s efforts on removing difficulties is not the answer. Believers need to embrace the trials God allows them to undergo, knowing that those trials reveal their character, humble them, draw them closer to God, and allow Him to display His grace and power in their lives.<sup>8</sup>*

Thank God for His faithfulness, ask God for lovingkindness & compassion, & ...

**C. Trust God to Shame the Arrogant** (78) Those causing his affliction are again referred to as **the arrogant** (69). The psalmist asks God to put them to shame. **78**

Even the prayer that the proud should be ashamed is a prayer for their good. It’s like the prayer of Asaph in Ps 83:16, **Cover their faces with shame, Lord, so that they will seek Your name** (NIV). Although the writer recognized God’s sovereignty over all things, especially his own affliction, he also understood that the **arrogant** were still responsible for their actions & deserving of God’s justice. In vs 69 he says they **have forged a lie against me**. They’ve attempted to take the psalmist down with their smear campaign of slander. Perhaps he felt his resolve began to weaken under their verbal onslaught. So he counters, **But I shall meditate on Your precepts. I will stay true to you. I won’t crawl into the world of those who live in rumors, gossip, half-truths, & outright lies. I’ll mediate on Your Word of truth instead. Your Word will remain my guide no matter what.** We need to meditate, contemplate, & ponder God’s Word & then pray it back to Him as the psalmist does. Then ...

**D. Ask God to Vindicate the Righteous** (79) It’s always an encouragement to have fellow believers in the foxhole with us when we’re under attack. Maybe the psalmist, like Paul in 2 Tim 2:11-16,

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<sup>8</sup> 2 Corinthians, p 406



felt abandoned & forsaken. Perhaps some of his friends had been taken in by the lies of his attackers & turned away from him. Whatever the case, he prays God will act on his behalf. **79a** He asks that those who love & fear God would come back to him in fellowship & friendship. He knows he needs them. For the most part, the poet's been thinking about & praying for himself, but he realizes that what happens to him & how he reacts to it can be a source either of discouragement or encouragement to others. So he prays: **74a, 79**

Upon their return, he'll make known to them the testimonies of the Lord. It's like he says to God,  
*I will share with them Your faithfulness, Your lovingkindness, Your compassion, & Your mercy in my life. I hope this will encourage them. What I've learned in the school of hard-knocks I'll gladly share with others. The lessons were tough. But were worth it. I know now that I learned things I could learn no place else.*

Charles Bridges warns us when he says,

*As the believer finds trouble from the world, he prays that he may find help from the Lord's people ... It is painful therefore to see Christians often walking aloof from each other, & suffering coldness, distance, differences & distrust to divide them from their brethren.<sup>9</sup>*

We need each other, both in good times & in times of affliction. All too often we withdraw into ourselves & don't let each other know what we're going through. How does that help anyone? If you're afflicted & trusting completely in God & His faithfulness we need to see that to learn & be encouraged from it. If you're going through affliction & feel you just can't hold on any longer, we need to know that so we can come alongside you, encourage you, & get your focus back on our wonderful & faithful God. Please don't forget that.

The psalmist closes as he began, with prayer.

### **3. God Made Us That We Might Be Blameless 80**

He reminds himself of how closely the heart & life are connected, who we are on the inside & how we live on the outside. Prov 4:23 is an important reminder, **Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.** The psalmist knows he needs the Lord & His Word if he's to have a pure heart & live a **blameless** life. This doesn't mean sinless. It means mature, complete, or fully formed. The psalmist is saying, *bring me to completion; finish the work You started in my life.* How will God do that? By His grace through faith. Why does he pray this? **80b**

<sup>9</sup> Charles Bridges, <http://gracegems.org/26/bridges4.htm>

This is a valid desire. The Psalmist wanted a life lived unashamed. He desire was for no inward shame because he was right with God.

**A. Pray For Your Heart** Jer 17:9 tells us, **The heart is more deceitful than all else & is desperately sick; Who can understand it?** The psalmist knew this truth well & so he prays to the Lord, **May my heart be blameless in Your statutes.** He wanted to be above reproach in thought, motive, & action.

**B. Pray For Your Reputation** The psalmist knew he couldn't lose his salvation. However, he knew it was possible for him to be ashamed. He didn't want to fail his Lord in private or public. He knew the basic spiritual truth that states: *Be right on the inside & your life will be right on the outside.* That's what he desired. No one was ever more afflicted than our Lord Jesus. & yet He knew & accepted that there was good in that affliction & pain. God was being faithful to His Word to crush His Servant (Is 53:10) so that the nations might rejoice in the salvation of the Lord. As our Savior walked the road to the cross, He was comforted by the steadfast love & mercy of His Father. The prideful liars were put to shame on Resurrection Sunday when they found the tomb empty! Blameless in heart & spotless in life, the only shame our Savior bore was ours, not His. Affliction was the Creator's plan. To paraphrase vs 74, *we indeed see Him, the Lord Jesus, & rejoice!*

As we come to the end, think about the stages of faith during affliction we've seen:

1<sup>st</sup>, there's faith that obeys. **Now I keep your Word** (67).

2<sup>nd</sup>, there's faith that affirms: **It is good for me to be afflicted** (71).

3<sup>rd</sup>, there's faith that glorifies: **In faithfulness You afflicted me** (75).

When we reach this level, we're really saying, *I wouldn't change it if I could.* It's a wonderful thing to look back & declare that God has been proved correct in all He's done, that things had to happen the way they did, & that in the end, God has glorified Himself even in our worst afflictions.

Let's get practical. How should we respond to the afflictions of life? A few simple suggestions:

1. Thank God for your troubles. **In everything give thanks** (1 Thes 5:18). It's God's will that we should give thanks in every situation. While this doesn't mean we must give thanks for

everything, it does mean there are always reasons for gratitude no matter how grim our circumstances might seem. To paraphrase a familiar hymn:

*When upon life's billows, you are tempest-tossed.  
When you are discouraged thinking all is lost.  
Count your many TROUBLES, name them one by one,  
& it will surprise you what the Lord has done.*<sup>10</sup>

It's good & necessary that we *count our blessings*. But there's something faith-building when you count your troubles. As you do so, you'll be surprised to see how God has been at work bringing blessings through afflictions. Count your troubles & soon you'll be counting your blessings too.

2. Look for God's fingerprints in your life. If what we've seen today is true, then we ought to see evidence of God's work in all the troubles of life. Think of how your afflictions have drawn you closer to God. Look for evidence of answered prayer. Ask God to open your eyes to see how He's worked on your behalf. As He does so you'll be amazed & grateful.

3. Immerse yourself in God's Word. Everything in Ps 119 leads to this conclusion. When you're tempted to run from God's Word, run to it instead. Read it more, not less. Let your troubles drive you deep into His Word. Read it. Pray over it. Cling to it. Meditate on it. Recite God's promises back to Him. Let His Word be the foundation of your prayers. Resolve that with God's help, you'll obey Him no matter what happens to you or around you. If you do that, you'll emerge from your troubles with a faith much stronger than before they started.

4. Have faith in God. This means, don't give up & don't give in. Tell the Lord you'll continue to believe Him no matter what happens. Like Job say, **Though He slay me, I will hope in Him** (Job 13:15). Let your friends know your faith in God hasn't wavered. Tell the world that you believe God has led you to this place & that He won't desert you. He knows what is best & you trust Him completely.

5. Share what you've learned. One reason God helps us in our times of trouble is so we can help others in their times of trouble. God comforts us that we might comfort others.

Let me ask you some personal questions: What affliction are you currently experiencing? Are there trials in your life you desperately want to change? Are you struggling to keep your faith

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<sup>10</sup> *Count Your Blessings*, Johnson Oatman, Jr

intact as life seems to be falling apart around you? I wish I could tell you your experience is unusual, but it isn't. The old adage is true: *Into each life some rain must fall*. & some people seem to get a continual thunderstorm that often turns into a torrential downpour. & if life is good for you right now, enjoy it & give thanks to God. It won't stay that way forever. There's affliction around the corner sooner or later. But it's not what happens to us that matters. It's how we respond that makes all the difference. Your troubles are no mistake. In a deep & profound sense, & in a way we won't fully understand until we get to heaven, our troubles are a gift from our faithful God. They humble us, kill our pride, force us to admit our weakness, & drive us to the Savior who alone can help us. Sometimes we'll face things for which there's no earthly explanation. In those moments, hold on to God & His Word. Remember the sovereign bullet. Keep believing. Don't quit. Don't give up. Let God do His work in you. The greatest tragedy is to miss what God wants to teach us through our afflictions. May God bring us to the place where we can say with the psalmist, **71, 75**

& may we pray with the psalmist,

- **May I learn Your commandments (73)**
- **May those who fear you see me & be glad (74)**
- **May Your lovingkindness comfort me (76)**
- **May Your compassion come to me that I may live (77)**
- **May the arrogant be ashamed (78)**
- **May those who fear You turn to me (79)**
- **May my heart be blameless (80)**