

Kaph
 Psalm 119:81-88
 ABC 7/15/18

In his book *Walking with God through Pain & Suffering*, Tim Keller says,

*No matter what precautions we take, no matter how well we have put together a good life, no matter how hard we have worked to be healthy, wealthy, comfortable with friends & family, & successful with our career – something will inevitably ruin it.*¹

The songwriter of Ps 119 would heartily agree. He has sought to be faithful & obedient to God. He's tried to live in a way that honors the Lord. Where has that gotten him? He feels like his life is about to go up in smoke (83). It may be significant that vs 84 is the 1st in this psalm to fail to mention the Word of God. When the psalmist was down, did he lose sight of God's Word temporarily? We don't know but we do know he feels like his life on earth is almost at an end (87). As Spurgeon well says of this stanza,

*This portion of the gigantic psalm sees the psalmist in extremis. He is in great need. His enemies have brought him to the lowest condition of anguish & depression, yet he is faithful to the law & trustful in his God.... This octave is the midnight of the psalm, & very dark & black it is. Stars, however, shone out, & the last vs gives promise of the dawn.*²

There is hope even when we cannot see it. All others may oppose us & even seek our death, but do not despair, in His steadfast & loyal love our Savior will give us life. Robert Davidson, a Scottish commentator, says this:

*The psalmist is struggling to come to terms with the crisis in his life.... He has cried out to God but the answer is, 'Not yet.' He is near the end of his tether, exhausted, waiting, uncertain when the Lord's promised comfort will come.... He can think of no justification for what has happened to him. He is the Lord's faithful servant "persecuted without cause" by the "arrogant" who thinks nothing of the Lord's Torah & who are out to trap him. He can only hold on, believing that the "faithfulness" that he associates with the Lord stands in the sharpest contrast to the "falsehood" which characterizes his persecutors.*³

This stanza take us through the valley of despair to the mountain of hope & life. Before we get into it, let's read it & pray. **81-88**

This psalm & this section of Ps 119 is about submission to God in the time of trial & affliction & even persecution. Jesus, our sympathetic Savior, also understands what it means to submit to God. Heb 5:7 says, **In the days of His flesh, He (Jesus) offered up prayers & supplications with loud**

¹ p 3

² *Treasury of David*, Psalm 119:81

³ *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, pp 396-397

crying & tears to the One able to save Him from death, & He was heard because of His piety or reverence. In the words, **to the One able to save Him from death**, we see something of Jesus' submission to God's will. We see it as well in the Garden of Gethsemane & on the cross itself. In the Garden of Gethsemane He cried, **My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will** (Mt 26:39). & of course, the answer is, *No*. On the cross, He prays, **My God, My God! Why have You forsaken Me?** (Mt 27:46). & there is no answer at all. In all things, Jesus submitted Himself to God & submission to God is one of the secrets of living victoriously the Christian life. How do we submit ourselves to God? Ps 119:81-88 is helpful.

1. Admit Your Need for God (81-83) You really don't know that God is all you need until God is all you have. This marvelous truth is often found only on the road of suffering, a road marked by anxiety, affliction, despair, disappointment, evil, pain, tribulations, & trials. Ever experience that? The Christian life is a battleground not a playground & we must expect troubles (Jn 16:33). It's a war, not a vacation. We won't make it without God & admitting that is crucial. The psalmist testifies to his need for the Lord in 3 ways in vss 81-83 where he is fainting but hoping.

A. My Soul Longs for Salvation 81a

If we're to submit to God in affliction & persecution, then we must look to God for **salvation** or deliverance. What the psalmist wants is the deliverance God has for him. He isn't trying to find some way, anyway out of his predicament. He wants God's deliverance. He begins this stanza expressing his absolute need for the Lord. The NIV puts it, **My soul faints with longing for your salvation**. There's a clear sense of desperation & urgency in this cry. **Languishes** or **faints** has the idea of coming to the end. It's the same verb used in vs 87 where it's translated **almost destroyed me**. Languishing is the loss of strength, a collapse. The psalmist felt his soul was so weak, so empty of strength that he couldn't stand it. He's overwhelmed with a sense of exhaustion & emptiness. His situation is critical as the following vss make clear. He needs God to intervene & to do so quickly. He knows that without the salvation of God through every step of his day, he won't survive.

In the last several sections, including today's, the psalmist has spoken of his ill treatment at the hands of those who dislike & oppose him. In vs 42 he is reproached or taunted, in 51 he's mocked, in 61 he's bound, in 69 smeared, & in 78 wronged. Here in Kaph he's still being harassed by the arrogant (85). We sense he's feeling overwhelmed. What he wanted & needed was God's salvation. He wanted no deliverance but that which came from God. His desire was for **Your salvation**. If God doesn't save him he won't make it. The only hope he has is in the Lord & in His Word. With his cry for salvation, he's raising his empty hands to God in an expression of intense spiritual hunger, absolute helplessness, & submission. How does he expect God to bring **salvation**? Through His Word. Thus a declaration of faith is voiced in the midst of his pain, **I wait for Your word** or **I put my hope in Your word**. **Wait, hope**, it's translated both ways. Why **wait** for God's Word? Because His sure & certain **hope** was in God fulfilling His promises. For the world, **hope** is a mere wish based on a desire or plan of theirs. For believers, hope is grounded in the promises of God who always speaks the truth & is faithful to all His Word all the time. Biblical hope isn't a wish but an absolute future reality guaranteed by God Himself. Rom 15:4 says, **Whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance & the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope**. As the inspired (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pt 1:21) & inerrant (Ps 119:160; Jn 17:17; cf. Dan 10:21a; Js 1:18a) Word of God, the Bible is full of God-given promises, guarantees in which we can confidently trust. The psalmist, despite trials & difficulties, learned to live in that expectation: **My soul languishes for Your salvation; I wait or hope for your word** (81). He wrote in vs 49, **Remember the word to Your servant, In which You have made me hope**. Hope is also confirmed through trials. Because Christians have hope, even the most severe affliction can't separate us from being safe in His hands (Rom 8:31-39). Those who hope in God & His Word are able to endure the most difficult circumstances of this life without losing their joy. After all, no matter how uncertain life seems, God always remains the same, He is the all-powerful King of the universe & the loving Father of His children & He will bring them all to glory. If we're going to submit ourselves to God in affliction & trial, we must hope in God & His Word. His longing for deliverance drives him to God's Word & he hopes in it &

it alone. Anything in life that drives us to the Word is a good thing, regardless of the package in which it comes. This place of desperate yet not despairing is known to all followers of God. Paul refers to this in 2 Cor 4:8-9: **We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. In it all, Paul could say, we have the same spirit of faith (2 Cor 4:13).** Think of Jesus again in the book of Hebrews. **He endured the cross, despising the shame, how? For the joy set before Him (12:2).** The salvation the Father had for Him. The salvation God was going to give through Him. The salvation of millions upon millions who would believe in Him. It was that joy that He set His eyes upon. His soul longed for that salvation & therefore **He endured the cross, despising the shame.** There's the 1st way of submission to God — looking for deliverance in God's salvation only. Another commentator says, *A believer in God, however sore afflicted he be, seeks not to be delivered, but in a way allowed by God.*⁴ & the psalmist says, *Lord, deliver me, but only deliver me in Your way. Give me Your salvation.*

B. My Eyes Look for You 82

The image of the **soul** in vs 81 moves to the **eyes** in vs 82. The idea, however, is much the same. Just as his soul hopes in God's Word, his **eyes fail with longing for Your word or looking for Your promise** (NIV). This draws the picture of someone looking down a path as far as he can & not seeing any hope in sight. *I'm coming to the end of my rope. I look at what lies ahead—at the persecutions, the sufferings, all the horrible things yet to come—and I don't know how I'm going to make it.* He's fatigued & worn out because the promise he's waited for hasn't yet come. He believed that God would keep His promise to save him, but it hasn't happened yet. It's like he says, *You said You'd save me but here I am! Nothing has changed. I've looked & there's no relief in sight.* This despair leads to a heartfelt question, **When will You comfort me?** This is why the psalmist searched the Scriptures so diligently. *Talk to me. I need Your Word.* He wanted comfort in his present distress. This sense of personal need is a wonderful motivation for diligent study of God's Word. Spurgeon provides a helpful word at this point, *This experience of waiting & fainting*

⁴ David Dickson, *Psalms* (119:81)

*is well-known by full-grown saints, & it teaches them many precious lessons which they would never learn by any other means.*⁵ In his sermon titled *God's Time for Comforting*,⁶ Spurgeon gave some practical answers to the question, **When will You comfort me?**

- Comfort will come when we put away unbelief.
- Comfort will come when we are finished complaining.
- Comfort will come when we put away the sin that we tolerate.
- Comfort will come when we fulfill the duties we have neglected.

& I would add, comfort will come in God's perfect timing! How do we submit to God when circumstances are all wrong? When affliction is all around? We focus on God's promises. I've mentioned Spurgeon's *Checkbook of the Bank of Faith*, which is a collection of Bible promises to believers. I suggest you compile your own collection of God's promises. As you read through the Scriptures, write out for yourself the Bible promises you find as you read God's Word. Go back to them frequently & meditate on them, recite them, believe them, & pray them back to God. When God says to you, **I will never leave you nor forsake you** (Heb 13:5; Dt 31:8), pray to Him, *Lord, don't leave me or forsake me. You've promised me You won't!* He'll always hear that prayer because He's made that promise. So how do you submit yourself to God when circumstances are filled with affliction & trial? By trusting in God's promises & by praying God's promise back to Him.

C. My Life Depends on You 83

The word picture here is graphic. To the Jews, wine represented joy & fullness while a shriveled wineskin is a picture of uselessness, sadness, & emptiness. The poet is like a dried, cracked, worn out, useless wineskin hung by a fire. The flames & heat of suffering have rendered him useless. It's as if he were an old wineskin, dry, cracked, & blackened with soot & smoke. He felt dry, shriveled up, & charred, as if God is finished with him & he's of little or no value any more. He felt the thick smoke of his fiery trials were destroying & rendering him useless. While our trials are often smoky & uncomfortable they don't consume us because God won't let them. Again Spurgeon says,

⁵ *Treasury of David*, Psalm 119:82

⁶ www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons53.viii.html

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, & smoke cannot smother it. A man may be reduced to skin & bone, & all his comfort may be dried out of him, & yet he may hold fast his integrity & glorify his God. It is, however, no marvel that in such a case the eyes which are tormented with the smoke cry out for the Lord's delivering hand, & the heart, heated & faint, longs for the divine salvation.⁷

In spite of all that's happening to the psalmist, he hasn't forgotten or turned away from the Word of God. Despite his sense of weakness, he was determined to **not forget God's statutes**. Remembering the Word of God has become the most important thing in his life. Weakness wouldn't make him forget God's Word. God's Word remains in his mind. He's down, but not yet out! He's saying, *I don't understand, but I will stay with You to the very end. I will keep on recalling Your Word*. What a beautiful truth we see here. Asking questions of God & having faith in God aren't incompatible. When we suffer, they often go together. So admit your need for the Lord & your submission to Him in the midst of your doubts.

2. Identify Your Concerns to God (84-87) A truth of life is that suffering is real, sometimes overwhelming, often unfair, but always meaningful. Our sovereign God always has a purpose for it & if we face it correctly, it can drive us like a nail deep into the love & compassion of God which anchors us with more stability & strength than we can imagine. Vss 84-87 revolve around the cry for help at the end of vs 86. They list the specifics of his despair & distress. He's saying, *I've remained faithful & look what it's got me. I'm confused. I'm disappointed. I'm hurting*. But wisely he goes to the Lord & opens his heart to Him. He recounts what's going on in his life. Although he's questioning, he's also waiting on God for the answer.

A. I Need Your Help With Persecutors Vs 84 is one of the few in this Psalm that doesn't specifically mention God's Word. Has his weakness & the injustice he's suffering through led him to such despair that he's lost focus on God's Word? We don't know. But we do know this vs is made up of 2 questions: **How many are the days of Your servant? &, When will You execute judgment on those who persecute me?** These questions bare his soul once again. The grammar expresses an implied answer that his days are indeed few. If God doesn't act quickly to deal with the psalmist's persecutors, it will be too late. If we flip the questions into statements, this is what he's saying:

⁷ www.gospelweb.net/SpurgeonGoldenAlphabet/FS_GoldenAlphabet.htm

I've suffered enough. I've endured persecution enough. I don't have much time left. You need to do something quick! While he's questioning God, don't miss that he's not seeking any personal vengeance at all. He's a man of God's Word & knows that God said, **Vengeance is Mine; I will repay** (Dt 32:35). Although he's never read Rom 12:19, he knows its truth. **Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God.** While in the midst of afflictions, we all want payback now, but that's not our job. We must wait on God & His timing to **execute judgment**. We must never take into our own hands what rightly belongs to Him. This stanza has a great deal to say about the psalmist's enemies, as if they monopolized his thoughts. Yet at the end of the stanza, his thoughts are once again on God & His Word.

B. I Need Your Help to Endure 85

The **arrogant**, who care nothing for the Word of God, have tracked the psalmist down like a wild animal. In vs 110 he'll characterize them as layers of snares. In both cases he was targeted as an innocent victim. They've tried to trap him having **dug pits for him**. Note the plural. They didn't set a trap, they set numerous traps. They were cruel & crafty deceivers. Their pits were contrary to the command to love your neighbor. These arrogant, lying persecutors (84, 86) come at him again & again from every angle. They're relentless in their goal to take him down & take him out! 1 Tim 3:1 admonishes us to be above reproach & of absolute integrity. Only then will we be able to avoid the pitfalls & the snares the evil one sends to take us down & ruin our life. When the prideful attack, walk humbly before the Lord in His Word. The enemy may be digging pits, but the Lord will see to it that they fall into them first (Ps 9:15; Prov 26:27).

C. I Need Your Help With Liars 86

The Psalmist found faithfulness & refuge in the commandments of God. This was in contrast to the persecution he found from his enemies. All the psalmist can do is rely completely on the Lord & His Word, a Word he knows is sure, true, & trustworthy (128, 142, 151, 160). He affirms with conviction, **All Your commandments are faithful**. He uses the same word he used in vs 75. Not only does God afflict him in **faithfulness**, but God's Word is also **faithful**. It's true, inerrant, & infallible! Back in vs 30 we read that the psalmist had chosen **the faithful way**. God's way, the

true way. In contrast, the arrogant persecute him with falsehoods. Will he fight back? Yes, by fleeing to God & crying out to Him, **Help me!** It's impossible for me to improve on the words of Spurgeon here:

This is a golden prayer, as precious as it is short. The words are few, but the meaning is full. Help was needed that the persecuted one might avoid the snare, might bear up under reproach, & might act so prudently as to baffle his foes. God's help is our hope. Whoever may hurt us, it matters not so long as the Lord helps us; for if indeed the Lord helps us, none can really hurt us. Many a time have these words been groaned out by troubled saints, for they are such as suit a thousand conditions of need, pain, distress, weakness, & sin. "Help, Lord," will be a fitting prayer for youth & age, for labour & suffering, for life & death. No other help is sufficient, but God's help is all sufficient & we cast ourselves upon it without fear.⁸

In absolute submission to God, he realizes there is no help but God's help. Therefore, **help me!** Sometimes that's all we can think or say & it is sufficient.

D. I Need Your Help With the Vicious While vs 87 resonates with the theme of death & destruction vs 88 gives the other side of it with revival & resurrection. The arrogant have so hounded & persecuted him that he says, **They almost destroyed me on earth.** Literally it says **in the earth.** That seems odd until you remember vs 85 which says his enemies were digging pits for him. They wanted to kill him & see him buried. No wonder he's so down! They've **almost** done him in. But there's a world of comfort in that word **almost**. It reminds us that though our foes may press for our complete destruction, God will preserve us. He allows us to be attacked, yet at the same time sets a limit to the success of the attackers. **Almost** is a word of God's gracious protection. As he concludes the 1st half of this psalm, the author pours out his soul.

- His soul languishes (81)
- His eyes fail (82)
- His body feels like a wineskin hanging in smoke (83)
- His life is quickly slipping away (84)
- His life is threatened by the traps of the arrogant (85)
- His persecutors use lies against him (86)
- His life has almost been destroyed (87)

But as for me (87), he says. This is emphatic. In spite of the persecution he suffers, the psalmist clings firmly to God's Word. He's determined to persevere in His commitment to the Word. Even so, he won't forsake God or His Word. **But as for me, I did not forsake Your precepts.** What gave

⁸ *Treasury of David*, Psalm 119:86

the psalmist the power to stand before his tormentors? The very Word on which he chose to lean. Nothing would make the psalmist forsake God's Word. He would cling to it in good times & in bad times. Spurgeon says, *If we stick to the precepts we shall be rescued by the promises.*⁹ To the very end he's following God, trusting & obeying Him. His enemies want to bury him in their pits, but he still believes in & will obey God. Life, he believes, is on the other side, even if it means death on this side.

3. Trust in God's Lovingkindness 88

Revive me, he says. *Restore me! Strengthen me! Motivate me! Give me the abundant life only You can give.* The Psalmist looked to God for new life, for revival. Yet he knew this wasn't deserved, even by someone as in love with God's Word as he was. Instead, he prayed, *Revive me according to Your lovingkindness*, & not according to what he deserved or had earned. How do you submit yourself to God in affliction & trial? You look for life only in God's **lovingkindness**. The life God offers isn't one of just existence. It's a life of abundance & fullness. & yet the road of life is often marked by pain & suffering. Without knowing God & that He is for us, we'd find it unbearable. The path would be too hard to walk. But the Psalmist had a great love for God & His Word. God was his God. His trust wasn't in his own love for God but in the goodness & grace & love of God towards him. How will God give him all these things? Only one way: According to His **lovingkindness**. We need the mercy that withholds the judgment we deserve & the grace that gives all the riches & blessings we don't deserve. Both are possible only because of the love that sent Jesus to the cross on our behalf. In this last vs of the Kaph stanza the psalmist reminds us of 2 companions God provides to see us home, companions we can be certain will never leave us or forsake us.

A. We Have His Lovingkindness What truth does the children's song teach us? *Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.*¹⁰ The psalmist has endured terrible suffering & injustice. He's been lied about at the very least, but probably much more (87). Nevertheless, the love of God isn't just his hope, it is his life. In words that have the ring of resurrection, he asks his Lord,

⁹ Ibid, Psalm 119:87

¹⁰ *Jesus Loves Me*, Anna Bartlett Warner

Revive me according to Your lovingkindness, Your *hesed*. In other words, *In Your steadfast, faithful, & loyal love, give me life. Restore my life. Revive my life. Renew my life out of the overflow of your loyal, faithful love, a love that endures forever.* As Timothy Keller says,

*The only love that won't disappoint you is one that can't change, that can't be lost, that is not based on the ups & downs of life or of how well you live. It is something that not even death can take away from you. God's love is the only thing like that.*¹¹

There is nothing like it in this world. We're told by this world that there are thousands of delights & joys that outstrip anything you can find in God & His Word. Don't believe it! There's nothing like the love & friendship of God. That's what the psalmist is saying here.

In Your steadfast love, in Your lovingkindness, O God, give me life. That's what I want. That's what I need. I don't want any trinket in its place. I don't want any substitute offer. I don't want any temporary band-aid that's not going to give what only Your lovingkindness can give.

& he submits himself to God & His lovingkindness.

B. We Have His Word As we move forward on the path of God, on one side is God's love & the other is God's Word. The Psalmist understood that the purpose of a revived spirit within him was for a more faithful, obedient walk with God. **88a**

The testimony of Your mouth is a declaration of direct revelation from God. His Lord's grace would be received with gratitude, generating further obedience. He is living out Dt 8:3 which says, **man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.** It's another witness to the divine inspiration of Holy Scripture. The Psalmist rightly understood that the Word of God actually came from the mouth of God. He wasn't ignorant of the fact that God had used human authors. But God so directed those human authors that what they wrote could accurately be called words from the mouth of God. If the Bible gives us words from the mouth of God, we can confidently say that the Bible is infallible; that is, in its original, autograph documents (of which we have many extremely reliable copies), it is absolutely without error. Since the mouth communicates words, we also insist that the words of the Bible are infallible, & not merely the ideas. Spurgeon says,

¹¹ *Walking with God through Pain & Suffering*, p 304

To me there is no explanation of those words except that which involves verbal & infallible inspiration. The testimony of God's mouth must be given in words: God's heart has thoughts, but God's mouth has words; & words from the omniscient & true God must be infallible.¹²

God's Word is our companion along with the Lord's **lovingkindness**. Because God loves & sustains him, the psalmist says, *I'll obey You & Your Words. Your love motivated me & empowers me to obey you. Your Word guides me & informs me how.* God's love & His Word are gifts given to us to keep us in the battle. Twin gifts to sustain us to the end. When the Father allows His children to go into the furnace of affliction, He keeps His eye on the clock & His hand on the thermostat. He knows how long & how much. To walk by sight will bring unrest & weakness. To walk by faith will bring peace & strength.

Many of the older commentators saw significance in the shapes of the Hebrew letters.¹³ Kaph is a curved letter, similar to a half circle & was often thought of as a hand held out to receive some gift or blessing. Here the author is in need & he knows the only One who can answer his need is God. Hence, he holds out his hand toward him as a beggar. That is all any of us can do. If we hold out hands filled with our own good works, there's 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.

Vss 81-88 poetically & beautifully capture the passion of our Savior. It's a lament that's easy to hear Jesus praying. From His suffering to His death to His resurrection, it's all here! Again, Keller puts it well,

Jesus lost all His glory so that we could be clothed in it. He was shut out so we could get access. He was bound, nailed, so that we could be free. He was cast out so we could approach. & Jesus took away the only kind of suffering that can really destroy you: that is being cast away from God. He took that so that now all suffering that comes into your life will only make you great. A lump of coal under pressure becomes a diamond. & the suffering of a person in Christ only turns you into somebody gorgeous.¹⁴

Let's pray.

¹² Sermon titled *Grappling Irons*, preached 5/4/1884

¹³ Herbert Lockyer, *Psalms: A Devotional Commentary*, p 569

¹⁴ *Walking with God through Pain & Suffering*, pp 180-181