

Qoph  
 Psalm 119:145-152  
 ABC 10/14/18

As we look at our passage this morning you're going to say, *This sounds familiar! Here's the psalmist, in trouble, crying out to God for help.* & you may be thinking, *This is a little repetitious.* When you think that, just remember that God is patient with us & He says the same thing over & over & over again to us in a variety of ways because He knows we're slow to learn & slow to believe & slow to obey at times. &, if you're like me, your prayer life needs reviving frequently. If so, this portion of Ps 119 is for us. We'll be looking at vss 145-152. What is causing the psalmist to cry out to God? It has to do with his enemies. Their presence has been mentioned often. Vss 145-52 seem to concentrate on this reality & what can be done with their threats & scheming. The writer turns to God in prayer with God's Word before him. God's Word reminds him that although **those who devise wicked schemes are near** (150), God is also **near** (151). That makes all the difference! Yet these vss aren't really about the psalmist's enemies, as bad as they were. They're about the writer's prayer life & how he'd learned to use God's Word when praying. In this section we see 4 patterns of prayer as an example for us to follow to revive our prayer lives. **145-**

**152** PRAY

**1. Pray Wholeheartedly 145-146**

We see here the importance of being earnest or zealous in prayer. As the passage begins, this is not merely a duty or formality to the poet. There's a desperate urgency & intensity in the phrases of his pleas: **I cry out with all my heart; answer me, O Lord!** (145). **I cried to You; save me** (146). Vs 147 adds, **I ... cry for help.** He's calling on God to answer & save him, & he's doing it with all his heart. The petitions **answer me** & **save me** are short, staccato statements, which are appropriate for one who is in trouble & earnestly seeking help. One of the ways to revive & breathe life into our prayer life is to recognize our desperate need for God's help. If you don't have the same heart cry as this text, all the more reason to pray for it fervently. As you read Scripture, if your heart falls short of what you read, pray & plead with God to make this the cry of your heart. Heb 5:7 tells us of Jesus, **He offered up both prayers & supplications with loud crying &**

tears to the One able to save Him from death. Our Savior, in time of trouble & danger, lifted up His voice not calmly, but with loud cries & tears. If Jesus did this, how much more should we? Not just for ourselves but for others as well. We read in Col 4:12-13, **Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers ... I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you.** Epaphras probably isn't one of the more famous names in the Bible. But I can't think of anything greater than for a faithful Christian, behind the scenes, **earnestly** praying for his fellow believers. Many of the most spiritual men & women of any time aren't the ones up front but the ones on their knees who faithfully, fervently, & wholeheartedly pray. Other translations have Epaphras **fervently** laboring in prayer & even **wrestling ... struggling on behalf of** others. In other words, he worked hard at praying. Do we? I know I often fail & have lots of room to grow. How about you? Charles Bridges says, *Your soul would not be so empty of comfort if your mouth were not so empty of prayer.*<sup>1</sup> May this be an encouragement to all of us to be more urgent & desperate to pray earnestly & wholeheartedly.

Vs 145 begins, **I cried.** Calvin says the Hebrew *verb cry always conveys the idea of earnestness; referring, as it does, not so much to the loudness of the voice as to the vehemency & ardor of the mind.*<sup>2</sup> It speaks of more than volume & that there's an intensity as he prayed. This is clear in the next phrase **with all my heart.** What's that mean? It means his prayers weren't half-hearted. They were wholehearted cries calling out in pain & need. This kind of prayer is much better than the most eloquent prayers of a Pharisee who only wanted to be heard by men. In John Bunyan's *Dying Sayings*, he says in prayer, it's better to have *heart without words than ... words without a heart.*<sup>3</sup> It is the heart that God looks to. That is an OT principle the Pharisees missed. Matthew Henry said, *lip labour, if that be all, is lost labour.*<sup>4</sup> In vs 145 the psalmist prays, **Answer me, O LORD.** This is a prayer that God would listen & answer kindly. Ps 66:16-20 tells us, **Come & hear, all who fear God, & I will tell of what He has done for my soul ... If I regard wickedness in my heart,**

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<sup>1</sup> *Exposition of Psalm CXIX*, p 407

<sup>2</sup> *Commentary on Psalms*, [www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom12.iii.iv.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom12.iii.iv.html)

<sup>3</sup> *The Poetry of John Bunyan*, Vol 1

<sup>4</sup> *An Exposition of All the Books of the Old & New Testaments*, electronic edition

The Lord will not hear; But certainly God has heard; He has given heed to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, Who has not turned away my prayer. If we do not listen & respond to what God has to say to us, God will not listen & respond to what we have to say to Him. It's only those who hear God (Ps 66:16) that God will hear (18-19), not those whose ears take in the Word while their hearts cherish their sin. In Ps 5 we have the prayer, **Give ear to my words ... consider my groaning ... heed the sound of my cry**, & as he prays he expresses his confidence, **in the morning ... You will hear my voice** (1-3). God hears everything, but the psalm there speaks of an early earnest cry for help in faith that he is confident God will listen & hear. **146**

Notice the vs says, **I cried to You**. He wasn't crying to others about this. His 1<sup>st</sup> thought wasn't to call up a friend & cry on his shoulder & find sympathy & a pity party from a support group. He says to God, **I cried to You**. It's to God 1<sup>st</sup> & foremost that he cries out to & looks to for support & for help. God is the One who has the power & ability to do something about our problems. Jesus has true sympathy for our weaknesses as our High Priest who on earth was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin (Heb 4:15). He was known as a friend to sinners (Mt 11:19; Lk 7:34), & He's the Friend we should turn to 1<sup>st</sup> & fully.

Notice in both vss 145 & 146, he's earnest not merely for God's help but his heart's prayer is for help so he can obey the Word of God. This wasn't merely a cry for help, deliverance, or forgiveness. This was a cry for obedience. He prays with desperation, **Hear or answer me, O LORD! I will observe or keep your statutes** (145). & 146 says, **Save me & I shall keep your testimonies**. This prayer isn't motivated by a desire for ease & comfort. It's motivated by a determination to obey God more & more. He passionately cried out to God for the wisdom, strength, & ability to obey Him. This is a prayer that pleases God. The grammar of this phrase connects his obedience as the purpose or result of the prayer, **save me**. Look again at vs 146. He says, **I cried to You; save me**, with an emphasis on **You** because God is the only one who can save or deliver us from our troubles. Often the way God does so is by giving us the grace to go through the trial. Notice again he prays, **Save me**, so that **I shall keep Your testimonies**. The psalmist wasn't bargaining with God (*Answer my prayers & I'll obey You*). No, he was dedicating

himself to God to obey Him no matter how He answers his prayers. He isn't praying, *save me, so I can keep doing my own thing*, which is the way some understand the gospel. Many emphasize the love of Jesus but leave out His Lordship & calls to repent & diminish it to a mental acknowledgement of facts. But the biblical call to believe isn't a mere mental trust in Him for eternity, while desiring to live your best life now, enjoying your sin, & banking on salvation in the next life. If you believe in Jesus you also believe what He said; that to come after Him you must determine to turn from your sin, deny yourself, take up your cross, & follow Him (Lk 9:23). It's not that you do all those things before you believe. It's that a true follower of Jesus wants to obey what Jesus said. The gospel isn't fire insurance so you can keep living in sin while disregarding all warnings & cautions. We're saved to serve the Savior, not our sin. The believer prays like this vs, **save me** (from sin, not to sin) & *I will keep Your Word*. We don't keep God's Word to earn salvation. Salvation comes 1<sup>st</sup>. Then as God's grace transforms us we now have the desire to obey. Even the word order of this vs is important: **Save me** & then **I will keep** or **obey**. It's only by God's grace that we can obey. But if your lifestyle isn't obedience by grace, the Bible challenges you to examine yourself to see if you've received God's grace. If you don't have a heart desiring to keep God's Word, examine yourself carefully. Have you ever truly received God's life-changing gospel? We aren't only dependent on God's grace in initial salvation, His grace to be regenerated, & to believe as a result of God's work in us. We're also dependent for God's grace to keep us saved & to continually deliver us from evil (Mt 6:13). The prayer in this vs, **save me**, isn't an unbeliever crying for salvation from sin, but a believer crying for God's ongoing deliverance from sin.

Remember Peter? He walked on water. But when he took his eyes off Jesus & began to sink, he cried out to the Lord the same words as the psalmist, **Save me!** (Mt 14:29-30). It wasn't a long or eloquent or flowery prayer, but it was a wholehearted prayer, & one Jesus answered. May God help us to see our own desperate need & to pray more earnestly, so that our prayers can be more effective. What does Js 5 say? **The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, & he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, & it did not**

rain on the earth for 3 years & six months. Then he prayed again, & the sky poured rain... (16-18). James reminds us how God worked through Elijah when he prayed earnestly. He's encouraging us to be people of wholehearted prayer too. We must be those who earnestly seek God's will & pray for it & thus become agents of the blessing God brings. At the end of the book, James even gives us a place to start, suggesting that we pray for sinners. For **he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death & will cover a multitude of sins** (Js 5:20). We need to pray earnestly like Elijah. Like Elijah did on Mount Carmel, we can put wood on the altar, spiritually speaking, by reading & studying the Word, but we need earnest prayer for fire from heaven to enflame our souls, as we offer ourselves as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1). May God kindle our hearts to be on fire, through prayer, for Him!

## **2. Pray Without Ceasing 147-148**

Notice the words **before dawn & night watches**. Ps 5 says, **In the morning, O Lord, You will hear my voice** (3). Ps 88:13 tells us, **... in the morning my prayer comes before You**. Ps 130:6 says, **My soul waits for the Lord More than the watchmen for the morning**. The language of watchmen, or **night watches**, refers to how the Jews divided up the evenings into watches or periods, from sunset to 10 pm, from 10-2:00 am, & a 3<sup>rd</sup> watch till sunrise. Maybe, as there was the changing of the watch in the middle of the night, the psalmist would wake up & use the opportunity to meditate on God's Word (how God talks to us) & he prays God's Word back to Him (how we talk to God). It seems he planned times with God but there were also times when he would awake or couldn't sleep. Instead of counting sheep, or checking his FB, he'd call on the Shepherd who helps him lie down in peaceful pastures with still waters (Ps 23). This writer's life wasn't compartmentalized to a time with God & then time for everything else. Every part of life, day & night, he was God-centered & God-worshiping. Vs 62 says, **At midnight I shall rise to give thanks to you** & vs 164 says, **7 times a day I praise you**. The idea of vss 147-148 is like Ps 1:2 where it says, **on His law he meditates day & night**, meaning constantly, "morning, noon, & night," 24/7, all-day every day, constant & continual prayer & meditation. As David says in Ps 139, **when I awake, I am still with You** (18). His communion with the Lord was such that it was the natural, nonstop awareness of

ongoing fellowship with God. When he would stir & roll over in his bed, his mind would go to thoughts of God's truth & that God was with him. When Elijah was on Mount Carmel he pointed out that this is what makes the true God unique. We pray to Him at any time of any day or night & He hears us, because He never slumbers nor sleeps (Ps 121:4). But as the prophets of Baal prayed to their false god with no response, Elijah mocks them saying, **Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep & needs to be awakened** (1 Kgs 18:27). What foolishness to trust in anything or anyone besides the only true God! On the other hand, if we truly believe in this God what a privilege & motivation to pray at all times to Him!

In 147 he prays & in 148 he meditates on Scripture. This suggests there's a 2-part & 2-way communication involved in our duty to pray constantly, or as Paul said, **pray without ceasing** (1 Thes 5:17). We read & meditate on Scripture, not only to help keep us from sin (Ps 119:11), but also to fuel our meditation & prayers. We can't be in constant communication with God unless we let Him speak to us throughout the day through His Word which informs & renews our thinking about everything in life. It's what God demanded of Joshua when he was about to lead the Israelites into the promised land.

**Do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day & night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, & then you will have success** (Josh 1:7-8).

Col 3:16-17 tells us, **Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you...** What will the results include? **Singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.** Everything we do or say should be permeated with thankfulness to God & done in the name of & for the glory of Jesus. To **pray without ceasing** is a constant communion with God. Prayer is to be a natural & constant part of our lives. It isn't to be restricted only to Sundays or special times of prayer. We're to be people whose lives are marked by an attitude of consistent prayer. One commentator describes it this way:

*If we hear of something bad happening, we pray for God to act in the situation for His glory & people's good. If we hear of something good, we respond with immediate praise to God, for He has been glorified. In short, we view everything that comes from a spiritual perspective. When Paul looked around his world, everything he saw prompted him to prayer in some way. When he thought of or heard about one of his beloved churches, it moved him to prayer (2 Tim 1:3). Are we getting the picture? No intermission in our prayer. Our lives are permeated by a spiritual perspective. Nehemiah provides a wonderful example of such praying without ceasing ... The king asked Nehemiah to make a request of him that he might grant it. Before replying that the King send him to Judah, Nehemiah prayed a quick, brief prayer (Neh 2:4). In the midst of a stressful situation, Nehemiah was conscious of God's purpose.<sup>5</sup>*

Look at vs 148. His eyes were open like a watchman for the night watches. This passage has a military mentality, a soldier's state of mind, a wartime way of thinking. We **pray without ceasing** more when we recognize spiritual warfare more (Eph 6). The familiar phrase **watch & pray** goes back to when Nehemiah was leading the people in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem & restoring the gates. The enemy didn't want the city to be rebuilt, so they used fear & deceit to hinder the work. What was Nehemiah's defense? **We prayed to our God, & because of them, the enemy, we set a guard or watch against them day & night** (Neh 4:9). Jesus (Mt 26:41; Mk 13:33), Paul (Col 4:2), & Peter (1 Pt 4:7) commanded God's people to **watch & pray**, to be on guard & pray with intelligence & alertness. *We're soldiers in a battle & we dare not go to sleep while on duty.*<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah tells us, **Arise, cry aloud in the night At the beginning of the night watches; Pour out your heart like water Before the presence of the Lord** (Lam 2:19). Pray wholeheartedly & without ceasing.

**3. Pray Biblically** The 3<sup>rd</sup> thing the psalmist teaches about prayer in these vss is that prayer is best when it's biblical. What's that mean? It means it needs to accompany & flow from our Bible study. When our prayers repeat & claim God's very words & promises back to Him, our prayers become biblical. The psalmist expresses this when he talks about God's hearing him in accordance with God's love & renewing his life according to God's laws (149). & what distressed him about the wicked is that they were far from God's law (150). **149-150**

He says, *Hear my voice according to what? According to Your **hesed**, Your steadfast love, Your lovingkindness, Your covenant love.* He's not saying, *I'm perfect, therefore You must listen to me.*

<sup>5</sup> JD Watson, *The Sufficiency of God's Word – An Exposition of Psalm 119*

<sup>6</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Be Exultant*, p 137

No, he has confidence in the character of God. He knows that God is loving, loyal, & righteous. Therefore, he has confidence in lifting up his voice in prayer to Him. & his prayer for revival is **according to** God's **ordinances**, a synonym for biblical truth, especially its judgments. This word has been explained as emphasizing God's ...

*...binding judicial decisions that establish a precedent & binding law ... in effect, "God, I want You to hear me based upon Your truth, Your decisions, Your will." He does not say, "Give me what I want ..." rather give me what meets Your will ... There is the serious error today about prayer that says we can ask anything regardless of God's will & Word. There are even those who say we can "demand things from God" & that there are things God "must" do. Today's "healing movement," for example, says we can demand good health when we are Spirit filled. The "prosperity movement" says we can demand financial prosperity when we are good stewards of our money & ask God for more. Others just say that God will give us anything we want & even define prayer as "asking & receiving." How shameless all that is! In such schemes, God is lowered to the position of a butler who comes to serve us when we ring a bell. God has now become the servant instead of us.<sup>7</sup>*

Biblical prayer isn't twisting God's arm to get what we want. It's the turning of our will to submit to what God wants & will do. What would you think of kids who spoke to their parents only when they needed something? Spoiled brats! Prayer is more than asking, prayer is loving. If we love the Word of God we must also love the God of the Word & express that love to Him. Twice in this vs he says **according to** & he doesn't say *according to my character or my desires*, but according to God's lovingkindness & Word. This is prayer, not based on his own merit, but on God's mercy. Prayer isn't a means for us to get our will done in heaven as we want it on earth. Jesus taught us to pray **Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven** (Mt 6:10). Even Jesus prayed in the garden, **not my will, but Thine** (Lk 22:42). How arrogant if that's not how we pray! Praying biblically is so important because it's only in God's Word that we can know God's will, & it's prayer in accord with God's will that God answers. 1 Jn 5:14-15 tells us, **this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. & if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.** Jesus says, **If you abide in Me, & My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, & it will be done for you** (Jn 15:7). Balancing the Word & prayer is crucial also because all Bible & no prayer can result in light without heat. But all prayer & no Bible can result in zeal without

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<sup>7</sup> Watson, *ibid*

knowledge. Both extremes are harmful. The early church had the balance right. Acts 2:42 tells us, **They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching & to fellowship, to the breaking of bread & to prayer.** A few chapters later we read that the leaders would **devote themselves to prayer & to the ministry of the word** (Acts 6:4). We need both instruction & intercession to be balanced believers. We must use prayer in our study of the Word of God. & we also must use the Word of God in our prayers. 150

This is what's driving the urgency of the psalmists prayer. He's being surrounded by the wicked & he fears their desires for him. Did you notice an interesting juxtaposition of words here? *They draw near.* The reason they're drawing near to persecute him is because **they are far from God's law.** Because they're far from the Word of God they don't honor it & they engage in evil purposes against God's people. Here's the problem: They're drawing near him but they're far from God. Reminds me of the imbalanced Pharisees who **draw near with their lips, but their heart is far away from God** (Mt 15:8). As we pray wholeheartedly & without ceasing it must be biblical in that we pray according to God's Word & will. Finally, we must ...

#### 4. Pray in Faith 151-152

The 4<sup>th</sup> truth to be learned about prayer in these vss is that prayer must be in faith, believing. It must be earnest, a constant way of life, & biblical, but it must also be in faith. I referred earlier to the book of James because he has so much to say about prayer. He also writes about prayer in chapter 1. There he's urging us to pray for wisdom, promising that if we ask for wisdom, God will give it. Then he adds, **But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven & tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways** (Js 1:5-8). But suppose we do doubt, & we often do, what then? Clearly, we must ask God even for the faith we need to pray in faith. We must be like the man who asked Jesus to heal his demon-possessed son. He begged Jesus, **if You can do anything, take pity on us & help us! Jesus said to him, "If You can?" All things are possible to him who believes.**" The man exclaimed, **I do believe; help my unbelief** (Mk 9:23-24). Jesus healed his son. Like that desperate father, our faith isn't strong. It's

always mixed with unbelief & doubt. But God gives faith & strengthens our faith. Besides, we don't need an overwhelming amount of faith for God to hear us, since our strength isn't in our faith but in God, who is faith's object. We remember how Jesus also said, **if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' & it will move; & nothing will be impossible to you** (Mt 17:20). How is this faith cultivated? By studying the Bible & learning what God is like. As we study the Bible we get to know God, & our faith is made strong because it is in Him.

Did you notice the movement from vs 150 to 151? He said the wicked **draw near**, but then vs 151 says, **You are near, O Lord**. Those who are far from God's law come near to the psalmist, but God is already near him. God is never far from those who love Him & believe His Word is truth. The New Bible Commentary sums it up well:

*The nearer life's threats the nearer the Lord. **Near** (151) is a 'next-of-kin' word [Heb. for kinsman in book of Ruth]. The Lord has pledged Himself to be our nearest relative who, in our helplessness, takes all our needs as His own ... thus ... our assurance that He is our next-of-kin rests on His unchanging testimony (statutes) to what He is & does.<sup>8</sup>*

This is the blessed assurance of believers: The Lord is near, no matter how near our enemies & trials are. God will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb 13:5). When trouble is near, God is nearer, & it's that hope which becomes our help. Do we believe that? Do you believe it? That when those who don't love the Lord, those who don't believe His Word, draw near to you to do harm, they're the ones who are really in danger, because whether they realize it or not, the Lord is near to you. The 2<sup>nd</sup> half of vs 151 reinforces this confidence in affirming everything God says is truth, which gives us great comfort & confidence in our reliable & faithful God. If we call upon Him, He will be near as He promises. Ps 145:18-19 tells us, **The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry & will save them.** Back in Dt 4:7 we read, **For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him?** Js 4:7-10 says, **Submit therefore to God ... Draw near to God & He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; & purify your hearts, you double-minded ... Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord.** In Ps 119, wicked sinners who

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<sup>8</sup> DA Carson, editor

haven't repented or submitted to God or changed their ways or humbled themselves, they **draw near** the psalmist (150) but the author prays trustingly that God is even nearer. As Derek Kidner puts it, *The threat is not glossed over; it is put in perspective by a bigger fact.*<sup>9</sup> This man of God had a very big God, & the bigger your God, the smaller your problems will be in comparison. The psalmist had a very big God, so all people & problems were much smaller. As Paul says in Phil 4,

**Rejoice in the Lord always... The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer & supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. & the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts & your minds in Christ Jesus ... The things you have learned & received & heard & seen in me, practice these things, & the God of peace will be with you ... I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am ... I can do all things through Him who strengthens me ... & my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (4-19).**

If you truly believe the Lord is near (5) then you can truly rejoice in the Lord always (4), & pray without ceasing instead of being anxious & worried (6). When you pray in faith in God & His truth the blessings are many, including:

- the mind-surpassing peace of God (7)
- the God of peace Himself being with us & near us (5), as we put His Word into practice (9)
- contentment no matter what our circumstances are (11)
- the near & present Lord's strength to do all things (13)
- the near & present provision of the Lord meeting our needs according to His riches spiritually in Christ Jesus (19)

John MacArthur says:

*When you have a thought, the Lord is near to read it; when you pray, the Lord is near to hear it; when you need His strength & power, He is near to provide it. In fact, He lives in you & is the source of your spiritual life. An awareness of His presence will keep you from being anxious or unstable.*

*Knowing the Lord is near helps us "be anxious for nothing" because we know He can handle everything we encounter. Fretting & worrying indicate a lack of trust in God. Either you've created another god who can't help you, or else you believe God could help you but refuses, which means you are questioning His integrity & Word. So delight in the Lord & meditate on His Word (Ps. 1:2). Know who He is & how He acts. Then you'll be able to say, "The Lord is near, so I'm not going to worry."<sup>10</sup>*

If you truly believe God is near, it will affect how you pray & live. The last vs of our passage says God's Word is firmly founded forever, so we can trust Him forever, as not only near to help, but a God who is unchanging & always faithful. *How firm a foundation we have as saints of the Lord*

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 73-150, p 428

<sup>10</sup> Truth for Today, p 343

*given here in God's excellent Word.* May God revive our prayers & our faith in our gigantic, glorious, & gracious God.