



*Sweeter
than
Honey*

D E V O T I O N A L 4



CHRIST
CHURCH

Psalm 119:65-96

TETH

⁶⁵ You have dealt well with your servant,
O Lord, according to your word.

⁶⁶ Teach me good judgment and knowledge,
for I believe in your commandments.

⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted I went astray,
but now I keep your word.

⁶⁸ You are good and do good;
teach me your statutes.

⁶⁹ The insolent smear me with lies,
but with my whole heart

I keep your precepts;
⁷⁰ their heart is unfeeling like fat,
but I delight in your law.

⁷¹ It is good for me that I was afflicted,
that I might learn your statutes.

⁷² The law of your mouth is better to me
than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

YODH

⁷³ Your hands have made and fashioned me;
give me understanding that I may learn
your commandments.

⁷⁴ Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice,
because I have hoped in your word.

⁷⁵ I know, O Lord, that your rules are righteous,
and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

⁷⁶ Let your steadfast love comfort me
according to your promise to your servant.

⁷⁷ Let your mercy come to me, that I may live;
for your law is my delight.

⁷⁸ Let the insolent be put to shame,
because they have wronged me
with falsehood;
as for me, I will meditate on your precepts.

⁷⁹ Let those who fear you turn to me,
that they may know your testimonies.

⁸⁰ May my heart be blameless in your statutes,
that I may not be put to shame!

KAPH

⁸¹ My soul longs for your salvation;
I hope in your word.

⁸² My eyes long for your promise;
I ask, "When will you comfort me?"

⁸³ For I have become like a wineskin
in the smoke,
yet I have not forgotten your statutes.

⁸⁴ How long must your servant endure?
When will you judge
those who persecute me?

⁸⁵ The insolent have dug pitfalls for me;
they do not live according to your law.

⁸⁶ All your commandments are sure;
they persecute me with falsehood; help me!

⁸⁷ They have almost made
an end of me on earth,
but I have not forsaken your precepts.

⁸⁸ In your steadfast love give me life,
that I may keep the testimonies
of your mouth.

LAMEDH

⁸⁹ Forever, O Lord, your word
is firmly fixed in the heavens.

⁹⁰ Your faithfulness endures to all generations;
you have established the earth,
and it stands fast.

⁹¹ By your appointment they stand this day,
for all things are your servants.

⁹² If your law had not been my delight,
I would have perished in my affliction.

⁹³ I will never forget your precepts,
for by them you have given me life.

⁹⁴ I am yours; save me,
for I have sought your precepts.

⁹⁵ The wicked lie in wait to destroy me,
but I consider your testimonies.

⁹⁶ I have seen a limit to all perfection,
but your commandment
is exceedingly broad.

Day 1

PSALM 119:65-72

Teth

- ⁶⁵ You have dealt well with your servant,
O Lord, according to your word.
- ⁶⁶ Teach me good judgment and knowledge,
for I believe in your commandments.
- ⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted I went astray,
but now I keep your word.
- ⁶⁸ You are good and do good;
teach me your statutes.
- ⁶⁹ The insolent smear me with lies,
but with my whole heart
I keep your precepts;
- ⁷⁰ their heart is unfeeling like fat,
but I delight in your law.
- ⁷¹ It is good for me that I was afflicted,
that I might learn your statutes.
- ⁷² The law of your mouth is better to me
than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

We lived in Ann Arbor when our sons were in school. Our youngest enjoyed basketball and played on a junior high team – second string. I was surprised at one point to find that he was concerned that he would need to get a basketball scholarship to attend the University of Michigan. I think he found it comforting when I explained to him that we had been saving and preparing for him to go to college without expecting him to get a basketball scholarship. Our son went to Calvin and played basketball - in Phys Ed. He maintained an academic scholarship all 4 years and did a lot of growing intellectually and emotionally while there.

So I wasn't all that surprised when our 7 year grandson stated last week that one of his occupational interests was professional basketball. He will figure out the realities too, I'm sure. The NBA is probably nowhere in his future. That's just fine. He has lots of other skills and talents that he will come to know and understand. When we're young we just don't understand all the realities we face and the resources we need to use to face them. It is an ordinary growing process to figure it all out.

What we see in the psalms is a growing process in the writers. We see their lack of spiritual

maturity. It seems as if they whine and gripe constantly. They don't take kindly to people who make life difficult for them. They confess their propensity to wander from God's ways. They're dealing with the realities of life. What is important to see is how conscious they are of how to get things right, and what they have to do to get there. They have issues and problems, but they know where to go to resolve them. They know how to keep coming back to God's Word and what that process will do for them. So it is good to see the end of the process, which is a joyful maturity.

It is also good to see what happens during the process. Correct attitudes develop. Trust in God grows. Judgment improves. Self-knowledge matures. There is even a realization that the struggle is good. In the end the final analysis is that the word of God is more valuable than gold and silver, even more valuable than a multi-million dollar basketball contract. Embrace the process.

Prayer

Thank you Lord for this growing process we don't always enjoy, but we know in the end is good for us. Help us to keep coming back to the word, which we know gives us life. Thank you for this resource that is available to us at any time of the day or night. Remind us always that your word is there for us and that your Spirit will implant its truths in our hearts and minds. Amen.

Day 2

PSALM 119:73-80

YODH

- ⁷³ Your hands have made and fashioned me;
give me understanding that I may learn your commandments.
- ⁷⁴ Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice,
because I have hoped in your word.
- ⁷⁵ I know, O Lord, that your rules are righteous,
and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.
- ⁷⁶ Let your steadfast love comfort me
according to your promise to your servant.
- ⁷⁷ Let your mercy come to me, that I may live;
for your law is my delight.
- ⁷⁸ Let the insolent be put to shame,
because they have wronged me
with falsehood;
as for me, I will meditate on your precepts.
- ⁷⁹ Let those who fear you turn to me,
that they may know your testimonies.
- ⁸⁰ May my heart be blameless in your statutes,
that I may not be put to shame!

If you watched any of the funeral service of Prince Philip in England, it's likely that you heard a commentator make some kind of remark about the British and their propensity to "keep a stiff upper lip." The psalmists could never be described as having "stiff upper lips." They let their emotions hang out there without reservation. Sometimes they even seem to be on emotional roller coasters, frequently moving from lows to highs, back to lows again and then often finishing on a high. In fact, one of the most common psalm form, the lament, seems ready made to provide a place for emotional expression.

God is not surprised at any of this emotion. We don't need to try to impress him with our abilities to stoically handle difficult situations. Sometimes we're up to dealing with things. Sometimes we're not. We don't need to hide our pain from him. He certainly knows all about pain. We aren't going to be downgraded spiritually or get a demerit because we had an emotional outburst. He created us and our emotions. He knows all our backgrounds, all our genes, our family dynamics, all the things that made us who we are. And He accepts us as we are.

Through it all, the psalmists usually get to the point of trust and the joy that comes with it. Surely, the wrestling process gives the Spirit an opening to get into our thinking and re-

mind us of who Christ is, what he has done and what he taught. All that together provides a healthy framework for our thought life and prayer life which we can embrace. Notice all the words that are filled with emotion: fear, rejoice, hope, afflicted, steadfast love, comfort, mercy, delight, tender mercies, shame, wronged, blameless. All these words stir emotional memories, some good, some bad. We can easily imagine experiences where these words would be used to describe an event or personal circumstance in our lives.

The psalmist's message is to trust in the world God created and his sustaining activity in it. Trust in God's nature – He is a caring God and that care extends to me. In the end there is most often an expression of joyful satisfaction that the psalmist is on the right path, that he/she will be protected, that the relationship with God is solid, that living in light of God's commands is possible. Even when we don't "feel" like it, we can pray those verses, knowing that they provide the paths and boundaries of trust, joy, even delight,

Prayer

Father, we are so glad that you really know us. Because of that fact, we don't need to pretend we're anything that we are not. You've designed a life for us that is full of joy. Help us to see that joy when it is barely visible to us. Help us to come to your word with an openness to see and experience all that you have created for us and in us through Christ our Lord.

Day 3

KAPH

PSALM 119:81-88

- ⁸¹ My soul longs for your salvation;
I hope in your word.
- ⁸² My eyes long for your promise;
I ask, "When will you comfort me?"
- ⁸³ For I have become like a wineskin
in the smoke,
yet I have not forgotten your statutes.
- ⁸⁴ How long must your servant endure?
When will you judge
those who persecute me?
- ⁸⁵ The insolent have dug pitfalls for me;
they do not live according to your law.
- ⁸⁶ All your commandments are sure;
they persecute me with falsehood; help me!
- ⁸⁷ They have almost made
an end of me on earth,
but I have not forsaken your precepts.
- ⁸⁸ In your steadfast love give me life,
that I may keep the testimonies
of your mouth.

Yesterday we thought about how God knows and accepts us as we are. We saw how foolish and fruitless it is to see life as a performance before God and others that will earn gold stars. If we're honest, all of us can recognize how natural that thinking is for us; we can easily believe the lie that we can impress God by covering our deficits and promoting our assets. Instead, we're invited to live truthfully as we meditate and pray through this psalm.

We have already established that this psalm is a love song/prayer. Whatever is expressed falls within the boundaries of a real relationship between a believer and a covenant God. Love for God and his Word precedes and inhabits every part of this psalm. But like us, the writer lives in a world that is not a friend to grace. Swimming against the current is exhausting; facing giants is intimidating; lies are treacherous; oppression hurts. Will we make it to the end?

Let's join the psalmist as he turns the truth about God and the reality of his experience over and over, like a dog with its bone. On the one hand, he savors God's goodness. On the other hand, he has to work hard to see it. Think about your own life, the good, the bad, and the ugly, as we sometimes say. What challenges make you wonder if God has forgotten you?

Where has the world's hatred for God fallen on you? How have you felt betrayed by lies?

We start with the psalmist by bringing the longings of our hearts to God, the God of our salvation:

Oh Lord, we long for a better world. We long for a world where truth is honored. We long for a world where justice and righteousness reign. We can hardly look at the pictures of starving children and fleeing refugees. We long for your promises to be realized in our own homes, churches, and workplaces. We hope in your Word.

But Lord, we see deception, disintegration, and death everywhere. Where are you? Where is the comfort you promised? When will you judge wrongdoers who hate your law? How long, Lord? We are fainting!

But Lord, where else can we go? Nothing else is true; you alone have words of eternal life. We have found that life in your steadfast love. We will not forget or forsake your precepts; we will keep your sure commands.

We can be sure the psalmist prayed these words out of an actual and desperate situation, one of many in OT history. And we can imagine Jesus prayed these petitions as he was the target for hatred, lies, treachery, and betrayal from those he had come to save. Jesus took these words to the cross, and became our salvation. Glory to his name!

Prayer

How we love your Word, Lord! Help us as we learn together how to hide it in our hearts so that we can always meditate until we come to truth. You are the God of our salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ. We come in his name, Amen.

Day 4

PSALM 119:89-96

LAMEDH

- ⁸⁹ Forever, O Lord, your word
is firmly fixed in the heavens.
- ⁹⁰ Your faithfulness endures to all generations;
you have established the earth,
and it stands fast.
- ⁹¹ By your appointment they stand this day,
for all things are your servants.
- ⁹² If your law had not been my delight,
I would have perished in my affliction.
- ⁹³ I will never forget your precepts,
for by them you have given me life.
- ⁹⁴ I am yours; save me,
for I have sought your precepts.
- ⁹⁵ The wicked lie in wait to destroy me,
but I consider your testimonies.
- ⁹⁶ I have seen a limit to all perfection,
but your commandment
is exceedingly broad.

Are you a city, mountain, or beach person? Though we all could have a playful debate about the benefits of a stylish metropolitan life with access to bakeries at every corner, endless outdoor recreation amidst breath-taking vistas, or sand volleyball and piña coladas under the warm solar embrace, today I'd like to humbly suggest to you that actually all three of these have one important characteristic in common. Whether in a city, in the mountains, or on a beach, they all draw the individual into a world more expansive than themselves. Rather than feeling belittled, these experiences actually bring about a contentment only achievable when we know we are part of something bigger than ourselves. The awe-factor hard-wired into our brains gets stirred up when we simultaneously feel how finite we are juxtaposed with how great our surrounding is.

The book of Ecclesiastes says that the Creator God has set eternity in the human heart (see Ecc 3:11). You and I are designed with a yearning for the eternal. In the infinite vitality of the metropolis, in the never-ending power emanating from the mountains, and in the indescribable beauty of a flaming sky when the ocean swallows up the sun, the city,

mountain and beach all give us a taste of that eternity.

Yet the psalm reminds us that it is not the created order that is eternal. Rather it is the Lord—who is, who was, and who is to come—that is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable! Forever is his Word. Forever is his faithfulness. How utterly comprehensive is his perfection.

As we are struck by how perishable we are amidst all kinds of troubles, let your heart be awe-struck by the enduring forever-faithfulness of the God who made you.

Prayer

Father in heaven, your steadfast love endures forever. We praise you for designing us to worship your infinite love, power, and glory. Thank you for how all of creation, when viewed through the illumination of your Word, points us to your eternity. O God, you are the solid rock on which we stand. We confess along with the psalmist that we are yours. By the power of your Holy Spirit, make us to seek after your precepts faithfully, just as Jesus did so perfectly. We are feeble and need the guiding help of your love and grace so desperately. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Day 5

PSALM 119:65-96

Here again are the four sections of Psalm 119 that we looked at this week. Read through and savor again a verse or two or three that really connected, convicted, or encouraged you.

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⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted I went astray,
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⁹⁴ I am yours; save me,
for I have sought your precepts.
⁹⁵ The wicked lie in wait to destroy me,
but I consider your testimonies.
⁹⁶ I have seen a limit to all perfection,
but your commandment
is exceedingly broad.

As you contemplate the graciousness of a God who has initiated a relationship with you and made himself known through his Word, pray your own prayer of response.

