

THE ETERNALLY FAITHFUL WORD OF GOD
PSALM 119:89-96

We are now six months into the New Year. The New Year is not so new anymore. It's not even a teenager. It's hit the doldrums of the middle age years. In case you haven't noticed, we are closer to next Christmas than last Christmas and the days are now getting shorter in anticipation of the winter months!

And since our year is "middle-aged," it seems a good time to do a check up on how we are doing in this year. It's time for a mid-year evaluation and a mid-course correction. I'm not concerned about our diets or exercise programs (most of us gave up on those about six months ago); I am concerned about our spiritual health and in particular the condition of our Bible intake.

Each year, at the beginning and middle of the year, we take a week to think about how we are doing in relation to our Bible intake, by examining a stanza from Psalm 119. And this is our week to do that.

And while I don't know all the specifics about all of your lives, I do know about my life and I know a few things about some of your lives and I know that this year has not turned out completely the way you planned:

- ✓ There have been relational difficulties and even broken relationships — a friend has become a hostile enemy for some of us.
- ✓ There have been financial burdens and loss
- ✓ There have been changes in health — some big and some small, but all reflecting the fallenness of our creation
- ✓ There has been death. I was going to say "there has been untimely death," but *all* death is untimely and hard and many of us have experienced the loss of someone through death this year.
- ✓ In a sentence, we have all experienced a variety of trials that have been weighty and hard. And most of them have been unanticipated.

How should we think about those difficulties? The writer of Psalm 119 helps us with that question in the twelfth stanza, beginning in verse 89. Here's what he says: Trials are limited. Trouble is not endless (it just feels that way). God's Word is faithful. And God's power in His Word is unlimited.

We can summarize the theme of this stanza this way:

WHEN YOU ARE AFFLICTED, TRUST THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD AND HIS WORD.

The theme of the previous stanza (which is why we read it earlier) is *when persecuted, pursue your hope in God's Word*. In that stanza, we saw many questions that God's people might have when they are suffering:

- ✓ Will God Intervene? (vv. 81-82)

- ✓ Has God Forgotten Me? (v. 83)
- ✓ Will God End the Persecution? (v. 84a)
- ✓ Will God be Just? (v. 84b)
- ✓ Will God Help Me? (vv. 85-86)
- ✓ Will God Be Gracious Again? (vv. 87-88)

It seems that in this stanza, the psalmist's condition has not changed significantly; he is still suffering. But here he reminds himself of two fundamental attributes of God and His Word, and affirms his commitment to that Word in very particular ways. And as we follow his pattern, we will find that when we lean on God and His Word, there is always hope in every circumstance.

Here are two reminders of the character of Scripture and several exhortations for how to respond to Scripture:

1. **What is Scripture? PERMANENT (vv. 89-91)**
2. **How Should I Respond to Scripture? (vv. 92-95)**
 - ✓ **DELIGHT in Scripture (v. 92)**
 - ✓ **REMEMBER Scripture (v. 93)**
 - ✓ **SEEK Scripture (v. 94)**
 - ✓ **CONSIDER Scripture (v. 95)**
3. **What is Scripture? AUTHORITATIVE (v. 96)**

The psalmist begins his admonition and instruction by pointing us first to an essential attribute of Scripture.

1. What is Scripture? **PERMANENT (vv. 89-91)**

- In the previous stanza, the psalmist was overwhelmed by questions about God and His Word (vv. 82, 84); he even finishes with the implied question, “Will God be gracious again?” (v. 88). The tone in this stanza is much different. He begins not by asking a question but by making a declaration. Here is his stability and strength. Here he will stand and be confident.
 - ✓ **Forever!** This first word in the stanza (and it is also the first word in the Hebrew text) sets the tone for the entire stanza. What is the declaration?
 - ✓ In fact, notice all the references to the eternal nature of God or His Word in this stanza: His Word (v. 89), His faithfulness and creation (v. 90), His ordinances (v. 91), His commandments (v. 96).
 - ✓ The stanza begins and ends with a bold declaration of the permanence of God’s Word.
 - ✓ And the one who owns this Word is **the Lord**. This is the covenant name of God — YHWH. It is a reference to His people and His own eternal nature (Ex. 3:6). The One who is eternal can only have an eternal Word.
- And notice that the psalmist reminds himself (and others who will sing this song) that God’s Word is **settled in Heaven**. He is emphasizing both Scripture’s position and place.
 - ✓ Scripture is **settled**. That is, it stands. It is positioned as steadfast, stable, and immovable. We would infer that it is permanent and unchanging. Everything we know needs updating. Computer and phone apps need updating. Address books need updating. Books need revisions. Cars need repairs and replacement. Light bulbs need changing. Flowers, trees, and grass need to be replanted. Even laundry detergent needs improvement! But Scripture is settled. No updates. No revisions. No repairs. No improvements. It is perfectly (*perfectly!*) adequate. It always has been perfect and because it is always perfect, it is always settled and steadfast. It is trustworthy.
 - ✓ And not only is Scripture settled, but notice its place — **in Heaven**. To say that it is stable *in Heaven* is to affirm that it emanates from God and exists in the presence of God and has the characteristics and qualities of God. And it is just as stable as the infinite and eternal God is stable.
 - ✓ And to say that Scripture is made stable in Heaven is also to set it in contrast with earth. Nothing on earth is eternal; everything on earth is subject to change and modification. But not in Heaven and not this Word.
 - ✓ The sense seems to be that no man can thwart this Word because no man can reach into Heaven to undo it. Who can go there to change it? Who was there to argue with it when it was written? Who will outlive it? No one. It is permanent and over us because it surpasses and supersedes us.

- Notice also that this Word is stable and permanent because God is stable and faithful.
 - ✓ So in verse 90, the psalmist says, ***Your faithfulness is established throughout all generations.***
 - ✓ God Himself is stable and permanent. Always. In every generation, God is unchangingly faithful. The generations of man change and pass away, but God and His Word never change or pass away. They have been and always will be fully adequate to meet the need of every person in every culture in every moment of history. There has never been a time when God’s faithfulness was inadequate.
 - ✓ And the faithfulness of God is seen in the creation of His world — ***You established the earth and it stands.*** Mankind may manage and care for creation, but God is sovereign over creation. The theology of this phrase is what is in view in **Colossians 1:16-17** or **Job 38-41**. The Word of God can no more fail than the earth can stop rotating on its axis. The earth is sometimes viewed as being on the shoulders of Atlas. No man can carry the world except the Lord alone. He establishes the earth and He keeps it in its place.
 - ✓ Look at creation and see the permanence of God. Go to the mountains and see God’s immovability. Watch the tides of the ocean and see His faithfulness. Look at the flowers and see His intricate beauty. See the constancy of 24-hour days and seven-day weeks and 365-day years and the predictable cycle of days and nights and see the faithfulness of God. Those aren’t accidents. They are specifically designed by God to demonstrate His faithfulness and permanence. Look at a baby and see the pinnacle of His creation and catch a glimpse of His personhood. And wherever you look in creation, see God’s faithfulness. Creation is designed by God and serves as a reminder to us each day of His presence and His faithful power and provision.
 - ✓ In fact, notice how the psalmist expands this idea in v. 91 — ***they stand this day.*** Who is ***they***?
 - The plural ***they*** is probably a reference to earth (v. 90) and Heaven (v. 89). Everything in Heaven and on earth are placed and stand where they are by the ***ordinances*** of God. “Ordinances” refers to judgments — so the all-wise Judge has decreed what is best for the human condition and has placed all things where they are according to that perfect judgment.
 - And whatever He has placed and wherever He has placed it — ***all things*** — the psalmist notes, ***are your servants.*** Every atom in the universe belongs to Him and serves His purposes.
 - God’s Word is stable because God is stable, and God’s stability is seen in all His sovereign creation. When we trust His Word, we will find that Word to be as secure as He is (**Mt. 7:24ff**).
- Life is full of trouble. And the psalmist has already noted the problems he has faced (**vv. 69, 78**). He — and we — might be tempted to look to things in this world to satisfy us. We might look to food or drink or possessions or relationships or sex or knowledge or education or wealth or position. All those things are unstable. None are permanent. Only God’s Word endures.
- When you have had trouble this year, where have you gone? What has been your source of strength? Where have you sought refuge and protection? What have you desired? What have you thought about and meditated on? These verses remind us that there is only one place that will be stable for us — the living and abiding Word of God (1 Pt. 1:24-25).

- In your trouble, have you run to the Word of God or from it? These verses remind us that we must run to the Word of God, because it alone, and the God who authored it — is permanent, faithful, and trustworthy.

2. How Should I Respond to Scripture? (vv. 92-95)

- A few years ago, as I was studying this psalm, I (finally) noticed that while the psalm exalts Scripture and describes its power in many ways, it also calls for us to respond to it in many different (45) ways.
- This stanza, in particular, emphasizes several responses that are appropriate in light of the faithfulness of Scripture. What we must not do with Scripture is affirm its greatness without responding to it. Because of what it is, we must do something about it. Here are four appropriate responses to the faithfulness of Scripture:

- **DELIGHT in Scripture (v. 92)**

- ✓ This is another verse that affirms the suffering of the psalmist — He is in (presently) **affliction**. What he has experienced is not explained exactly, but it is some kind of suffering that comes from living in this fallen world. It might have been through the persecution of others (vv. 69, 78, 84-87, 98, 110, 122), or simply from living in a fallen world (vv. 67, 71, 107). Regardless, he has experienced hardship in the world. The psalmist even attributes the suffering as coming from the hand of the Lord (v. 75). And the hardship was deadly, except for the fact that God’s Word was a delight and comfort to him.
- ✓ So notice the first clause — ***If Your law had not been my delight...*** That is, the Law of God was a delight to the psalmist. I want you to notice two particular items in this phrase:
 - It was **the Law** that delighted the psalmist. The psalmist found comfort in the commands of God. Very few manmade laws naturally provoke happiness. Laws produce grumbling, arguments, and chaffing. But the Law of God, when understood, produces delight.
 - The **delight** was a consequence of knowing and studying the Law, but it was also a choice for the psalmist. For something to be a delight is to be an object of play or amusement. It is something that is chosen and desired. This word is used only 7x in the OT, and 5x in this psalm (vv. 24, 77, 92, 143, 174). He chooses to think on the Scriptures and then discovers that they are His delight and joy. And even more, he chooses to find his delight in the Scriptures.
 - When I was about 8-years-old my folks left me with neighbors for an evening and they said, “We’re going to have pizza tonight!” To which I said, “I don’t like pizza.” “Have you ever *had* pizza?” “No.” “How do you know you don’t like it?” Similarly, many have no delight for Scripture because they have either never tasted it, or only had the frozen cardboard version.
 - Scripture has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found commanding and left untried. Yes, it will make demands. But as we obey, we will find those commands a joy.

- ✓ As one writer has noted, from this verse we learn that “God’s sufficiency is more than a match for our suffering.” If you are suffering (and we all are, in some way), then learn to cultivate delight in God’s Word. Your circumstances may not be happy, but by this Book, you will learn to be happy in the One who is over your circumstances.
- ✓ (As an aside, it is worth noting that he was so compelled by this verse, that Martin Luther wrote this verse on the inside cover of his Bible.)

• **REMEMBER Scripture (v. 93)**

- ✓ Actually, better than saying “I will remember...” the psalmist says, ***I will never forget.*** And actually, the verse begins with the same word as v. 89 — “forever.” So he says, “Forever, I will not forget your precepts.” He will not allow himself to lost sight of the instructions of God. He is active in cultivating a remembrance of and adherence to Scripture’s principles.
- ✓ And why should he remember Scripture? Because ***by them You have revived me.*** Actually, the sense is not just “restore to life,” but “give life.” The Word of God is life-giving. Just as God spoke in Genesis 1 and Adam and all creation came to life, so God’s Word brings life to those who hear it. My two favorite examples are Ezk. 37:1-10 and Jesus’ command to Lazarus, “Come forth...” When God speaks, things come to life, both in the physical and spiritual realms. Do we believe that God will revive us and give us life through His Word, or do we believe that life (and happiness) are to be found in other solutions?
- ✓ We might ask ourselves, “am I actively working to remember the precepts of God that govern my particular situation? Am I remembering what I need to remember about God from His Word in the trials that are giving me trouble?” In fact, it may be that I am struggling so much in my difficulty because I am not actively remembering God’s principles and promises for how to respond in those situations. This is not so much a call to Bible memory (though that will help), but an active reading and meditating and thinking on the truths that are contained in the Word of God.

• **SEEK Scripture (v. 94)**

- ✓ Because God has given life to the psalmist, he can say, ***I am Yours.*** He belongs to God because God has given him life. And because he belongs to God, then God can be trusted to save the psalmist. So he says, ***save me.*** Given that His enemies still want to destroy him (v. 95), it seems likely that the psalmist is thinking here about his physical life — “I am Yours spiritually, so I am seeking Your provision for my physical life also.” He repeats this request two more times: **vv. 117, 146.**
- ✓ It is appropriate to pray for safety and provision — and safety is to be found in God.
- ✓ And a further reason why he can ask for safety is ***I have sought Your precepts.*** Not only does the psalmist belong to God, but he also actively is pursuing fellowship with God. He has looked for and searched God’s Word and its authority over his life. The word means, “to seek with care.” [HALOT] The word is used 165x in the OT, and several times in this psalm — vv. 2, 10, 45, 94, 155. It means to enquire about something, to examine and study with diligence (e.g., Ez. 7:10; 10:16).

- ✓ The psalmist is careful in his study of God's word and pursues understanding with diligence.
- ✓ "Here is a believer who beat a path to the Bible, read it over and over, studied it, and when he had to make a decision, consulted it carefully. Philosophies change, political expedients fail, promises and contracts are broken, but the Word of God still stands." [Wiersbe, 128.]
- ✓ It has been my observation that when hard times come, the tendency of the flesh is to run away from God and His Word. Like Jonah, we go the opposite direction from God's command. Instead of feasting at the table of God's Word, we starve ourselves at the table of Hollywood. We find some pseudo-salve that cannot provide comfort or wisdom or direction.
- ✓ Interestingly, this word **precepts** is the same one as in v. 93 — it is a direction that comes from an overseer — someone who is responsible for a situation and can take action. So, God who has created us and the world knows how it should operate and gives appropriate commands. And rather than seeking those commands, we go to substitutes that have deficient knowledge and no ability to change us or help us.
- ✓ On vacation last week, Raye Jeanne happened to notice a driver in a car parked next to us — "He's using a Mapsco!" Almost instantly the girls said, "What's a Mapsco?" "It's a map that needs to be replaced at great cost every year because it becomes obsolete." That's the world system. It has no answers for our trials. What we need is to go purposefully, regularly, and daily to feed on the truths of Scripture to direct us when we are afflicted and suffering.

• **CONSIDER Scripture (v. 95)**

- ✓ This verse is an affirmation that the psalmist is still suffering and specifically, he is being persecuted. Others are wanting to do harm to him. **The wicked wait for me...** The wicked have set a snare to entrap him and they are watching for him to come by and then they want to **destroy** him. They long for his destruction. This is a good reminder that even when we obediently follow God, that does not mean our troubles will disappear. Our enemies, like his, may remain real.
- ✓ Yet what is profoundly helpful in this verse is to notice that even though his enemies were real, his attention wasn't focused on them. His focus was on the Word of God — **I shall diligently consider your testimonies.**
 - The word **testimonies** refers to a "witness." It testifies to what is true and false, right and wrong. It testifies for us when we are right and against us when we are wrong.
 - And the psalmist **diligently considers** what God says — he turns his attention to what God says and examines what God says, and forces himself to be attentive to God's examination.
 - Notice that there is a double waiting in this verse: the enemies wait for him and he waits for God and God's explanation. No matter how overt their pressure on him, he turns to the Lord.
- ✓ This directly speaks to our ungodly natural response in suffering: we look at the trial and attempt to justify ourselves and condemn our attackers; the psalmist looks to God and trusts His faithfulness.

- ✓ When the psalmist is under attack, he doesn't consider his enemies or their power; he considers and meditates on the testimonies of God. He remembers the promises of God in the dark parts of the night. This is the opposite of the anxious soul. This is contrary to the angry man. This is in opposition to the despondent and discouraged heart. When we are anxious, angry, or depressed, we are considering the weight and power of our enemies and our circumstances and ignoring the power of God and the authority of His Word.
- ✓ When you are being attacked, criticized, condemned, and pursued, when you are suffering, don't attempt to self-justify. Cling to the one who justifies you in spite of your sin. God to His Word for your hope. Only He and His Word will provide safety for you.

"When under pressure, my instinct is to be preoccupied by the causes of the pressure, to become obsessed even with them, paranoid, more and more anxious. But the response is to consider the testimonies. The enemies look horizontally at me, as it were from behind the ambush hedge. But I look up to the Lord and his word. And therefore I am kept safe." [Ash, *Bible Delight*, 126-7.]

3. What is Scripture? **AUTHORITATIVE (v. 96)**

- Here the psalmist concludes this stanza with a statement that seem to be identical in theme to v. 89. Everything in this world claims to be perfect, but is not. Only God's Word is faithful.
 - ✓ When the psalmist says, ***I have seen a limit to all perfection***, he means, "I have looked at everything that claims completeness and perfection, and it's all limited." Everything that is proposed as perfect by mankind is ultimately defective. It all needs fixing and transformation.
 - ✓ This phrase echoes what the writer of Ecclesiastes says (e.g., **1:2, 14; 2:11**, 15, 19, 21, 23, 26; 3:19; **4:4, 7-8**, 16; 5:10; 6:2; **12:8**). There is an emptiness to the claims of the world. They are unsatisfying to us and they are condemnable by God. They won't survive or give hope or life.
 - ✓ But God's commands? They are ***exceedingly broad***. What *is* extensive and powerful is God's Word. God's Word is broad enough to cover every situation. This phrase is actually understated — there is a limit to man's perfections, but there is no limit to the breadth of God's Word. It's not just "exceedingly" broad — it is *infinitely* broad. Whatever our circumstance, it is enough.
 - ✓ And the word ***commandment*** emphasizes the authority with which speaks. He has the right to command and give orders. His Word is not only faithful (v. 89); it is authoritative (v. 96).
- This is the power of Scripture according to **2 Tim. 3:16-17**
 - ✓ Only the Bible is authoritative to convict us of sin
 - ✓ Only the Bible is authoritative to correct our sin
 - ✓ Only the Bible is authoritative to train us to live righteously, apart from sin
 - ✓ Only the Bible is authoritative to make us adequate for ministry to other sinners
- What is Scripture? It is authoritative over every part of our lives.

CONCLUSION: In this stanza we have two of the most basic tenets about Scripture. It is faithful (true) because it comes from a faithful God. And because it is faithfully true, it is authoritative — it demands our submission. So, we learn to delight in it, remember it, seek it, and consider it.

The question today is, how are you doing? Has your affliction and suffering this year driven you to the Word of God or away from it? Has your persecution made you cling more tightly to the Word of God as your hope, or have you sought your refuge in the false and empty and limited gods of the world?

This isn't just a sermon to say, "Read your Bible." That will help and that is the beginning point. But this really is a sermon to say, "Take in the Bible..."

- ... let the faithful and stable Scriptures be your hope
- ... let God's commanding law be your joy and delight
- ... remember the greatness of God and His Word in your trials
- ... let the commands and principles of God direct the way you will respond in your suffering
- ... consider the testimony and witness of Scripture when others seek your destruction
- ... look at the eternal perfection of God's commands and the limitless failure of man's "perfection"

Let the Bible shape your response and your actions when you suffer (and when you don't suffer). Only God and only God's Word are faithful and true.

BENEDICTION: Psalm 1