

LIFE IN SEASONS OF LAMENT
PSALM 119: 153-160

When we are in crisis, we don't always think rightly or well. The disciples were no different. On one occasion, Jesus took the disciples on a boat trip across the Sea of Galilee — a body of water with which many of them were very familiar. Seemingly as soon as they were under way, Jesus went to the bottom of the boat to take a nap and while He was asleep, a tremendous storm arose on the Sea and the boat was taking on water faster than it could be bailed; we are led to believe that sinking was a possibility.

In desperation, the 12 woke up Jesus and said, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" (Mk. 4:38). That's an astounding question — does their Creator who made them in His image and wove together every aspect of their material and spiritual being not care about their survival? Does the One who created and notices and cares for every sparrow not care about these beloved men who were adopted as spiritual sons?

Before we accuse the disciples of folly, we should acknowledge that their response is not atypical. When suffering, people often complain not just *to* God, but *against* God: "Don't You see what is happening? Don't You care about me?" And that is exactly the scenario in the section of Psalm 119 before us this morning. Similar to the cry of the disciples, the tone of vv. 153-160 is a lament. The cries for help are repeated and urgent. The psalmist is experiencing trouble and goes to God for help.

While suffering is a common theme in this psalm, the later portions emphasize his suffering more than the earlier stanzas — it almost seems like he is becoming more desperate for help as he nears the end of the psalm. In some stanzas (as in vv. 145-152), the suffering is "generic," but in this stanza (vv. 153-160) it is clear that he is being oppressed by enemies; we might even use the word "persecuted."

Two words dominate this section (vv. 153-160): **Look** as his request/lament for God to consider his plight, and **revive** his request for God to specifically act on his behalf. Spurgeon calls this a "pleading passage."

Those two requests seem to form a **chiastic structure** to the psalm, which helps us understand its theme:

Look, and give me life (vv. 153–154)!

The wicked care nothing for your word (v. 155);

yet there are many compassions,

so give me life (v. 156)!

Still, there are many foes (v. 157);

the faithless care nothing for your word (v. 158);

look, and give me life (vv. 159–160). [Wilcock, *The Message of Psalms 73–150*, 216.]

Even though suffering and afflicted, the psalmist adheres to God in his suffering. He will say it this way:

WHEN OPPRESSED, BE CONFIDENT IN GOD TO SEE AND RESPOND TO YOUR NEED.

Observe **three** requests of the psalmist when he is oppressed by enemies:

1. Lord, Consider My **AFFLICTIONS** (vv. 153-154)
2. Lord, Consider My **AFFLICTERS** (vv. 155-158)
3. Lord, Consider My **AFFECTIONS** (vv. 159-160)
4. Summary: Remember **GOD** When Afflicted

When we are suffering and when we are persecuted we can make similar requests of the Lord, letting His Word direct those requests.

1. Lord, Consider My AFFLICTIONS (vv. 153-154)

- When the psalmist asks the Lord to **look** on his **afflictions**, he is asking because he is suffering.
 - ✓ The word **afflictions** is fairly common in the OT (cf. vv. 50, 92). It refers to his needy condition.
 - ✓ 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 living in a fallen world (vv. 67, 71, 107).
 - ✓ More probably it is from the persecution of others (he has a legal “cause” and defense, v. 154 and adversaries, v. 157). Persecution is a common theme in this psalm (vv. 69, 78, 84-87, 98, 110, 122).
 - ✓ A sad reality of this world is that we will experience hurt from those who should care. Some will take when they should give. Interacting with sinners will be costly at times.
- When the psalmist asks the Lord to **look** on his afflictions, he is asking for more than just “observation.”
 - ✓ He is asking God to be attentive to and act on his behalf in his situation — the word “see” sometimes infers acting on what is seen (Gen. 22:8 — “provide”).
 - ✓ We do the same in our conversations, “Don’t you see the milk on the floor?” implies doing something.
 - ✓ He also specifically asks, **rescue me** (“pull me out of the pit”). When he makes that request he is also acknowledging that he is not able to rectify his situation. He is dependent on the Lord.
 - ✓ On what basis can he say, **rescue me**? Because **I do not forget Your law**.
 - He does not mean “I have a mental remembrance of Your law/word.”
 - He means he has been faithful to the Lord — he has been obedient to do what the Law says.
 - ✓ This faithfulness is significant because it suggests and affirms relationship — “I belong to you; I have a problem; please help me.”
 - ✓ Multiple decades ago I had a financial need and I didn’t say anything to my dad about it; when he found out he said, “Why didn’t you tell me? I’m your father; I want to help.”
 - ✓ That’s the kind of relationship that the psalmist is appealing to for his help. He is in relationship with the Lord and he is aware of the Lord’s ability and desire to help, so he asks (Mt. 7:7ff).
- Verse 154 parallels the first verse of this stanza —
 - ✓ **Plead my cause** and **redeem** are legal terms; he needs a “defense attorney” against his accusers (v. 157) and he is asking the Lord for help. He wants vindication and only God can give it.
 - ✓ He also needs someone to be his kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 2:20; 3:12; 4:4-6ff) to provide for him. He needs someone to pay the price, but he also needs it to be someone who is closely related (again stressing the fellowship and relationship with God).
 - ✓ Then for the first time in this stanza he uses the phrase **revive me** — give me life. It can have the sense of “bring back to life,” but here probably has the sense of “let me experience joy in life again.”
 - ✓ This appeal isn’t based on his own faithfulness (153), but on the nature of God who gives life.

- Notice how the psalmist asks God to give him joy in life: **according to Your word** (promises).
 - ✓ The means God will use to bring life to the psalmist is the Word of God. There is spiritual life and joy in this book (**Heb. 4:12**).
 - ✓ The psalmist will repeat this request two more times (vv. 156, 159). Those requests affirm the power of the Word of God to give joy and satisfaction in life.
 - ✓ We cannot always improve our circumstances (or have them improved for us); but we *can* have joy in the midst of our difficulties, because of what is revealed in our troubles (**Is. 1:2ff**).
- In his suffering, the psalmist laments and asks God to consider his afflictions and plight and act for him. He then also asks God to consider the nature of those who are afflicting him...

2. Lord, Consider My **AFFLICTERS** (vv. 155-158)

- Three of the four verses in this section refer to the unrighteous character of his tormentors:
 - ✓ They are **far from salvation** and **wicked** (**155**) — they are infinitely distanced from salvation and they are guilty (culpable) of wicked sins. They have nothing in common with God (no relationship).
 - ✓ They demonstrate their wickedness by **not seeking Your statutes**. They are not interested in following or even knowing about the binding truths (**statutes**) of God’s Word. They want their own form of “truth” so they can indulge in wickedness and sin (cf. **Ps. 14:2**; Rom. 3:11).
 - ✓ In their sin, they have become the psalmist’s personal **persecutors and adversaries** (**157**, note the use of the pronoun, **my**). They follow after him to do him harm and are personal enemies of him. Their attacks are not the general sufferings of living in a world of sinners, but particular attacks of derision, mocking, and persecution that have the psalmist as their target.
 - ✓ They are **treacherous** (**158**) — they are untrustworthy deceivers who seek to entrap him.
 - ✓ They **do not keep Your word** — they are rebellious and disobedient. They are going their own way, attempting to suppress the truth of the Word of God that they know is true (**Rom. 1:18-19**).
 - ✓ These are the characteristics of the ones who are attacking the psalmist. *They are guilty and far from God and His truth.*
- In contrast, the psalmist again (as in v. 153) points to *his* life and desires —
 - ✓ He acknowledges the **great mercies** of God — He is not only merciful in nature, but abundant in dispensing His mercy to His people. (Which is to say He is compassionate and comforting; **2 Cor. 1**). Like a mother caring for a child, God cares for His own (Ps. 25:6). His afflictors might be numerous; God’s mercies are more numerous and more powerful.
 - ✓ He says **I do not turn aside from Your testimonies** — There is no deviation from God’s decrees and judgments (the things He has “testified to” as true). Cf. Josh. 1:7. The psalmist delights in the testimonies of God (vv. 24, 26, 119).

- ✓ The implication in this clause is that if the psalmist would abdicate from following God, the persecution would stop. But he is unwilling to give up obeying the Lord.
- ✓ And he *loathes* the *treacherous* — not because of the trouble they have created for him personally, but because *they do not keep your word*. He has revulsion for the ungodly, but it's not personal. It is because he is “defending” the character of God and standing up for Him (cf. **139:21-22**).
- Because of the oppression of the persecutors, the psalmist says again, *revive me...* (key verse, **156**).
 - ✓ Because God is compassionate, the psalmist appeals to Him for revival (new life). Interestingly, he uses an imperative (command) in addressing God. We know that he (and we) cannot compel God to act; the imperative carries the force of a request and suggest urgency — “I need help!”
 - ✓ This phrase reminds us that life (joy) is found in God’s Word: cf. **vv. 25, 37, 40, 50, 88, 93, 107, 149**.
 - ✓ Here he uses the word *ordinances* to refer to God’s Word — the word means “judgments” — the standard by which God will rightly “evaluate man’s condition...before Him. Scripture alone contains that final standard. Though God judges by His Word, yet the psalmist still deeply longs for those ordinances (vv. 20, 43), is comforted by them (v. 52), and gives thanks for them (vv. 62, 164).” [Kidner]
 - ✓ The judgments that will bring condemnation against his afflictors will also be a source of joy for the psalmist. Also notice this — he says, *I behold the treacherous* (158) — that’s the same word as “look” in v. 153 — and the inference is “if I see it, will You also make note of them and act rightly?”
 - ✓ We can trust the Lord to make right all that is wrong in this world (cf. **Ezk. 39:21-24**) — giving life and joy to His people and condemning the unrighteous.
- In his suffering, the psalmist laments and asks God to consider his afflictions and the nature of those who are afflicting him. Finally, he asks the Lord to consider his (the psalmist’s) affections...

3. Lord, Consider My AFFECTIONS (vv. 159-160)

- As the psalmist comes to the end of the stanza, he is no longer concerned with his suffering or his oppressors; he merely asks for the joy of the Lord to be granted to him.
- The word *consider* is the same word “look” (153) and “behold” (158).
 - ✓ As he concludes this stanza, he is asking God to evaluate and respond to his love for God’s Word.
 - ✓ He does not just obey God’s Word; he is drawn to it and finds delight and joy in it and God (**Dt. 6:5**).
 - ✓ True obedience is always linked to love (vv. 47-48, **97**, 113, 119, **127**, 132, **140**, 159, **163**, 165, **167**).
 - ✓ Because of that delight, he appropriately asks for God to *revive* him (3rd time). Here he observes that the revival (life) comes from God’s *lovingkindness* (loyal love — grace).
 - ✓ He can appeal to God for help in his suffering because there is no pretense in him; he loves the Lord.

- The final verse affirms, in part, why he loves the Word of God so much.
 - ✓ ***The sum of Your word is truth*** — the totality of God’s revelation is truth. There is nothing in His revelation that is not truth. *The true Word emanates from and is revealed by the true God.* **ln. 17:17.**
 - ✓ Not only is God’s Word true, but it is ***righteous*** and ***everlasting*** — eternal. God’s Word doesn’t reveal everything (it’s not exhaustive), but in everything it reveals, it is always right and true.
 - ✓ The Word of God is always right and true in every circumstance. It’s dependable and imperishable.
 - ✓ And God’s Word produces joy: “The Word is one of the few things that continue unshaken and immovable through the ages. Happy the man whose life is built on that foundation!” [Leupold]
- In his suffering, the psalmist laments and asks God to consider his afflictions and the nature of those who are afflicting him, and his affections. Let’s also see one more thing the psalmist has done for us...

4. Summary: Remember GOD When Afflicted

- Earlier I said, we cannot always improve our circumstances (or have them improved for us); but we can have joy in the midst of our difficulties, because of what is revealed in our troubles.
- A primary way that the Word gives us joy in our trials is by revealing the nature of God who is for us. That is what the psalmist has been doing in his lament; he has affirmed God’s character:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ He is Caretaker (v. 153a) ✓ He is Savior (v. 153b) ✓ He is Law Giver (v. 153b) ✓ He is Advocate (v. 154a) ✓ He is Kinsman-Redeemer (v. 154a) ✓ He is Life Giver (vv. 154b, 156b, 159b) ✓ He is Judge (v. 156b, “ordinances”) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ He is Mercy Giver (v. 156a) ✓ He is Covenant Keeper (“LORD,” 156, 159) ✓ He is Teacher (v. 159, “Your precepts”) ✓ He is Loyal Lord (v. 159, “Your lovingkindness”) ✓ He is Truth Speaker (v. 160)
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- All these realities of God are revealed in the Word of God. It is the source of joy and life (abundant, joyful living) for the psalmist. So here are some self-examining questions for us:
 - ✓ In your suffering (and some of you may be facing persecution like the psalmist), **where are you going for life and comfort?** What is your refuge? Where is your hope?
 - ✓ **Is your lament joyful** — i.e., are you dependent on God and His Word for your joy?
 - ✓ **When suffering, do we still love** (have obedient delight and allegiance to) God and His Word? Do we perceive it as being good, and being good for us in this situation?
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BENEDICTION: Psalm 19:12-14