

When You're down and troubled and You Need Some Loving Care

Psalm 119:25-32

Introduction: 1) They are the opening words to a song made popular by both Carole King and James Taylor. They also capture well the theme of stanza "Daleth" in the beautiful acrostic Psalm 119. The song: "You've got a Friend." The beginning lyrics: "When you're down and troubled, and you need a helping hand. And nothing, no nothing, is going right. Close your eyes and think of me, and soon I will be there."

2) The Psalmist is down and discouraged. He may even be experiencing a life or death situation. His cry is deep and heartfelt: "My soul clings to the dust" (v.25). "My soul melts away for sorrow" (vs. 28). He is at the end of himself and has nowhere to look but to His God. He is determined to draw near and he is confident his God will draw near to him enlarging his heart, setting his heart free from his difficulties, troubles and worries (v. 32). What are the steps to this spiritual freedom we discover in these verses?

I. Ask the Lord to revive your soul and give you understanding 119:25-27

Being honest before the Lord is always a wise course of action. As the omniscient God who knows everything, He is already fully aware of your

circumstances and situation. When you are disappointed, tell Him. When you are hurting, open your heart and pour out your sorrow. Acknowledge your need for Him and the healing and reviving power of His Word.

1) Ask Him to teach you His word 119:25-26

The Psalmist begins by describing his death-like circumstances. He laments, “My soul clings to the dust.” I am down and nearly done. All hope for life is almost gone. Because of what follows, his problem does not appear to be physical. Rather, his problem appears to be people, people who would lead him down a wrong path (v. 29) and put him to shame (v. 31). Therefore he prays that the Lord would “give him life,” revive or renew him “according to your word.” Further, in explaining his situation to the Lord (“when I told of my ways”), the Lord answered. In essence he is asking the Lord to do it again and to do so by “teaching me your statutes.” God’s word will strengthen him and help him make sense of life and the difficulties he is facing. God’s word will help him see things in proper perspective.

2) Meditate on His wondrous works 119:27

The way of understanding is often the way of meditation. It comes by putting our troubles in the context of God’s Word. In other words the more we know the Word the more life will make sense with its ebb and flow, with

its good times and difficult times. This is why the psalmist continues his prayer in verse 27 asking the Lord to help him “understand the way of your precepts.” And, as he “gains more understanding” (Ross, 491), he will meditate, reflect and chew over again and again the Lord’s wondrous works (cf. v. 18). Being reminded of God’s faithfulness in the past to Israel and to him personally, he can be confident and assured that God will remain faithful today and in the future. Luther said, “To be exercised in wondrous works means to discuss, speak, and debate the words of Christ and “chirp” them to each other sweetly and swiftly, like the little birds. . .” (*L.W.* vol. 11, 437).

II. Ask the Lord to sustain you and guide you in a life of integrity 119:28-29

Verses 28-29 parallel verses 25-27 in that they begin with a confession or lament of distress of the soul followed by a prayer asking for strength and guidance. The repetition of the same thought in different words may indicate just how severe the situation was. Words like depressed, discouraged, despondent capture well the heart of the psalmist. Spurgeon’s words are poignant, “Heaviness of heart is a killing thing, and when it abounds it threatens to turn life into a long death, in which a man seems to drop away in a perpetual drip of grief” (*TOD*, vo. 3, 191). What is the cure for such sorrow of the soul?

1) Ask the Lord to strengthen you from His word 119:28

The psalmist bares his soul to the Lord declaring, “My soul melts away for sorrow.” Drop by drop, my life is crying itself away. But, there is a medicine for the soul. It is the Word of God. Therefore the prayer, “strengthen me according to your word.” The idea is pick me up again, lift my soul and raise my spirits and do so by your powerful, living Word (cf. Heb. 4:12). It is not difficult for me to imagine this verse being a comfort to our Lord when he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Matthew 26:38 records him saying, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.” Our Savior walked this path, this way. We who follow him should never be surprised by the same.

2) Ask the Lord to lead you to live faithfully 119:29 (cf. v. 30)

The Psalmist has asked for strength to sustain his soul. He now asks for grace to guide his walk. “Put false ways from me.” The idea is guide me away from deception, falsehood and lies. Ross says, “The psalmist wants all that is false and pointless removed from his life, because he has chosen the way of faithfulness” (v. 30) (Ross, 492). Indeed, the way to insure that we don’t follow false ways is for our God to “graciously teach [us] your law” (cf. v.26). The necessity and the power of God’s Word is so amazing. Not only does it change the way we think, it changes the way we live. A Scripture saturated life, graciously conveyed by the divine teacher, will have

a different perspective and outlook on everything. The spectacles of faith informed by the word helps us see life and navigate life in a completely different way than those who do not abide in the Word. The Word of God truly is “a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:103). It is a gracious word from a gracious instructor.

III. Ask the Lord to keep you from shame and to gladden your heart

119:30-32

The final three verses contain four declarations of commitment and devotion to the Lord. They are easily identified by the personal pronoun “I”. “I have chosen, I have set, I cling, I pursue.” What is it that we must determine in our heart, in our soul, to go hard after in our relationship to our God? What is our role in the reviving of our soul?

1) Choose faithfulness 119:30

Having asked God to “put false ways far from me,” the psalmist makes a pledge with firm resolve, “I have chosen the way of faithfulness.” He shared “his way” in v. 26. He rejects “false ways” in v. 29. He now will pursue with determination the “faithful way,” the way of faithfulness. Van Gemeren provides a balanced perspective in the dynamic between the believer and his God. He writes, “On the one hand [the believer] depends

on the Lord for life, sustaining grace, and illumination (vv. 25-29), as God alone can deliver us from evil (v.29, cf. Matt. 6:13). On the other hand, human beings are fully responsible in seeking the Kingdom of God by choosing and living a life of loyalty to God and his word” (*EBC*, vol. 5, 865).

2) Set your mind on the Word 119:30

Having chosen the way of faithfulness, the psalmist declares, “I set your rules before me.” The NIV says, “I have set my heart on your laws.” In other words your word is ever before me. It is in my mind and before my eyes. It is my compass, my guide. It is my GPS! Where it tells me to go I will go even when others, or my own heart, tell me to pursue a different course or direction. I will trust your word amidst the fog and haze of life because in time I know the way will be made clear.

3) Cling to the Word 119:31

In verse 25 our song writer’s soul clings to the dust, to death. Here he is determined that he will cling, hold on strong, to the “testimonies of the Lord.” Though he felt as if death had a strong grip on his soul, he proclaims I will have a strong grip on your testimonies, O Yahweh. This is the personal, covenantal name of God appearing only here in this stanza. Life’s circumstances may tempt me to lose my grip on things, but I will

choose to grab hold of my Lord and His word and never let go. He will give me life (v.25), he will strengthen me (v.28), he will teach me (vv. 26, 29), and he will not let me be put to shame. Others may fail me, but my God will not. He will not let me down. Ever!

4) Run faithfully

119:32

This stanza ends on a note of commitment and confidence. There is an eagerness to honor the Lord made evidence by the promise, “I will run in the way of your commandments (cf. Heb. 12:1-2). I won’t just walk, I will run! There will be a delightful, enthusiastic and joyful passion for you and your word. And, I acknowledge my ability to do this is dependent on you. All of this will come to fruition “when you enlarge my heart.” The idea is as the Lord lifts the burdens of life through soaking in his word, my heart is set free from difficulties and troubles and I am released to run hard after my God and his way. Spurgeon puts it beautifully, “the feet soon run when the heart is free and energetic. Let the affections be aroused and eagerly set on divine things, and our actions will be full of force, swiftness, and delight. God must work in us first, and then we shall will and do according to his good pleasure . . . our running is the spontaneous leaping forward of a mind which has been set free by the hand of God” (Spurgeon, 193).

Conclusion: We began our study noting a secular song that has a similar theme to these verses in Psalm 119. I believe there is a gospel song that complements it even better. It was a favorite of mine as a little boy, and it remains the same to this day. It was written by a son to his mother to comfort her soul in a time of sorrow and trouble. (*Handbook to The Baptist Hymnal*, 269). Its title: “What a Friend We have in Jesus.”

What a Friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry Everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,

All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged, Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Can we find a friend so faithful Who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our every weakness, Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden, Cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Savior, still our refuge— Take it to the Lord in prayer;

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer;

In His arms He'll take and shield thee, Thou wilt find a solace there.