

Relying on God in Suffering

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[0 : 00] Well, amen to that. And thank you, Rachel and Lynn, for reading that to us. Please do keep it open. God's word, as we will see this morning, is vital. And so please do have it in front of you and follow along as we go.

So, Psalm 119. It's a great psalm. And in case you've not been around, I know we do have some visitors here this morning, but also sometimes we just forget, and that's okay. So we'll do a wee catch up on what Psalm 119 is all about.

This is the third in the series. So, so far you've missed 1 to 48. Well, the Psalms generally, they are spiritual songs written by various people. Some of them we don't even know who wrote them. An example would be this psalm. There is a bit of contention about who wrote this one.

But there are many themes throughout the Psalms. Yes, they are hymns of praise, but there is also wisdom to be found in many of the Psalms. There is also lament. There is a lot of crying out to God, asking why? Why are things happening the way that they are?

So that is the Psalms. And 119 is a famous one. Why? Well, it's the longest. It's the longest psalm. It is, in fact, longer than many books of the Bible. It is the longest chapter that we have in the whole of the Bible.

[1 : 25] And it could be a mix of themes, but really it is a wisdom psalm. And there is much wisdom, like we heard about with Solomon, there is much wisdom to be found in it.

But it is good to remember that it is a hymn. And it is a hymn celebrating God's law or God's word, God's precepts. All these words, they are pointing to God's word, God's written word. And it is a guide for life.

And what we will see this morning is the love that the writer has for God's word, but also for the author of it. Not himself, but the true author of God's word.

And as Ian laid out in the first week, it is a very clever literary, which I really struggle to say, literary piece of writing. It's an acrostic poem. So what it means is that, as you can maybe see, if you've got headings, Zion, Heth, Teth, and Yod in your Bibles, you might see that.

That is a letter of the Greek alphabet. And so essentially what the psalm is, is it's going through the A to Z, as we would call it, of God's word. And in the original Hebrew, each eight verses that you see in each section start with that letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

[2 : 53] It's very clever. And the repetition that we see in it, the repetition of the themes, there is so much repetition seen throughout the whole psalm. Well, it shows the theme and it adds emphasis. And we'll see that as we go through this morning.

You know, I stumbled across this from C.S. Lewis, writing about this particular psalm. The poem is not, and does not pretend to be, a sudden outpouring of the heart, like, say, Psalm 18.

It is a pattern, a thing done like embroidery, stitch by stitch, through long, quiet hours. The love of the subject and for the delight in the leisurely disciplined craftsmanship.

It is a wonderful psalm. And it is great that we can study it through our series and great that we can open it up this morning. So, intro over. Let's get us thinking.

Iron Brew gets you through. Have you seen those adverts, those billboards? There used to be adverts on the TV back in the day. Some of them were maybe a bit rude. But, you know, they certainly got the message across.

[4 : 03] And how they basically went was that someone was going through an awkward situation or a difficult time in a sort of jovial sense. But they cracked the Iron Brew and, oh, that just solved all their problems.

I'm sure there was a few Iron Brews cracked overnight, I imagine. But, you know, does Iron Brew get you through? Well, you know, I've had some long, hard days where, you know, an Iron Brew at

the end of the day, you know, it is nice.

It quenches that thirst. I'm sure after a long walk, you maybe tried one for the West Highland Wears who are here this morning. But, you know, does it get you through the actual difficult times in life? Well, I'm going to suggest, contrary to the above, no. No, it does not. So what does get us through the difficult times of life?

Well, this morning we're going to look at that. We're going to see what the psalmist has to say about how we get through difficult times in life. And as we've seen in the last couple of weeks, it's potentially difficult to split up these passages.

[5 : 10] There's so much repetition throughout. But I've just gone by splitting them based on each letter of the alphabet, each of the four sections. So we're going to see comfort while suffering.

We're going to see faithfulness in suffering. We're going to see learning through suffering. And we're going to see reliance during suffering. And as Corey pointed out to me, the word suffering is up there a lot.

But believe it or not, this is actually a fairly positive sermon. And it should hopefully be encouraging and challenging for us. So let's dive into comfort while suffering.

And we're looking at that first section, verse 49 to 56. So as already asked, where do we look for when we are suffering?

Where do we look for comfort? Is it, as Graham mentioned last week, do we go towards the excesses in life? Do we plow into our fitness regime? Do we go into the negative things?

[6 : 10] Do we plow ourselves into drink or alcohol, drugs, whatever it might be? Or do we just go for distractions? Are we bingeing Netflix, hiding away from the difficult times that we face?

I suppose you could call that option one. Or option two, like the writer here, do we go towards God? Do we look to him and his promises, the one who made us, the one who loves us?

Do we go towards him in our times of difficulty? Do we look to him for comfort? Let's see what the writer has to say. Well, first of all, we see that if we're going to go towards God for comfort, then we need to know his word.

We need to know the word of God. As I said earlier, repetition in the Psalms is so important. And if you look down, you can see the word remember three times in this section.

Verse 49, 52 and 55. The writer, he knows the word of God. He studies it. It is important to him.

[7 : 19] He knows it and has learned it so that he can remember it. He can bring it to mind when he needs it the most. We need to be students of God's word in order that it can be there for us and comfort us and that God can help us in times of need.

The Psalmist, he is remembering, and he only had the Torah, the first five books of the Bible available to him. But in those, in those Old Testament stories, he can see God's faithfulness. He remembers that. God has proven his faithfulness. You can read all about it. And we live in the privileged age of having the whole Bible there for us to read.

God's word. And we can see God's faithfulness to it. What a comfort that can be for us to remember where God has been faithful in the past.

And if we know God's word and we can remember it, then we need to trust in it. You might think that's the same thing. Well, it's very different.

[8 : 23] It's one thing to know something, but it's something else to wholeheartedly trust in it. Verse 49 says this, The word of God, it gives hope.

Verse 50, What is that hope? Well, the writer, he had hope in a faithful God.

But us, in this position that we find ourselves in, this age that we find ourselves in, it is the hope of eternity. The hope of eternity, it provides comfort for our present day suffering.

God, yes, he promises to help us on earth. He promises to be with us. But we have an assured future with him one day. That is the hope that we have in God.

But you know, it requires trust. It is not guaranteed. We need to do something to gain it. We need to trust in Jesus.

[9 : 37] You know, we often sing that hymn, don't we? Living hope. The Lord Jesus is our living hope. The Lord Jesus, yes, we can read about him. He came down.

He lived that perfect life. He died and rose again, having taken the suffering, the sin upon himself that we deserved. He took that upon himself.

Why? So that he can be our living hope. The writer here, he could read God's promises of a Messiah to come.

We see that in the Psalms, don't we? And yet we can think back on the Lord Jesus, the one who fulfilled these things, the Messiah, the Savior who came. And we can trust in him.

You know, the Lord Jesus, he promised that he would go and he will prepare a place for us and he will come back again to take us to be with him. That is the hope that we have, that we can read about in God's word.

[10:38] But first of all, we need to trust in the one that can make it happen. You know, often man's promises and words, they mean nothing, don't they?

How many times have we been let down by people? I'll meet you at five o'clock. They just don't appear. They don't come. People cancel on you. They let you down.

And we let down those that we love, don't we? But you know, with God, it is impossible. His promises are faithful and true. So we need to trust in the word.

You know, thirdly, comfort while suffering. Well, we need to work at it. We need to work at it. It's not a passive thing. In verse 51, and we've seen this throughout so far, that the arrogant mock me unmercifully, but I do not turn from your law.

He is ignoring the mockers. There is such outward pressure coming from people who are laughing at him, who are persecuting him here. But he is looking to the everlasting word, rather than the whims of man.

[11:47] You know, even in the most difficult situations, verse 54, your decrees are the theme of my song wherever I lodge. In the night, Lord, I remember your name, that I may keep your law.

The night, it speaks of darkness. It speaks of difficulty. It speaks of evil, the darkness. Even in this most difficult of time, he dwells on God's word.

And how can he do that? How can he have that strength? Well, it takes practice. Verse 56, This has been my practice. I obey your precepts.

It takes discipline and obedience. Training for godliness. It takes training. Why do we do things? Well, we do things out of a response of love.

And the writer here, he is obeying God because of that response of love that he has for the one who is faithful to him. 1 Timothy 4, verse 8 says, Godliness is profitable for all things since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

[13:07] Training for godliness is a worthy pursuit and we must do it. We cannot just sit idly by.

And if we do so, well, this is how the hope of eternity, it provides comfort for us while in present day suffering.

So that's section one. And then the writer moves on to talk about faithfulness in suffering in verses 57 to 64 in that second section.

So when the going gets tough, do we get going? That's the song, isn't it? The going gets tough, the tough get going. Well, first of all, we see that knowing who God is springs us into action.

You know, verbs are called doing words, aren't they? And we really see that here. Follow with me in this section. It says, promised, sought, considered, turned, hasten, obey, rise.

There's a real sense of action here in this section. He says in verse 57, you are my portion, Lord.

[14:25] The writer, he realizes God's worth and it causes him to obey and to seek his face. Neil, he brought this into his prayer about seeking the face of God.

What does that mean? Well, face, it could mean favor. But essentially, what he's talking about for us in this age is praying, seeking the face of God.

You know, remember the COVID song as I still call it, the blessing? It's talking about Numbers 6.

The Lord bless you and keep you, make his face shine upon you and give you peace.

There's a lesson here to pray earnestly to God. Seek his face and his favor. And we might think that praying isn't actually doing anything.

That's not an action word, is it? Well, it is. Pray earnestly. Prayer works. Prayer matters. So pray. Verse 59 to 61.

[15:31] The writer here, he considers his ways. I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes. I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands.

Though the wicked bind me with ropes, I will not forget your law. He considers his ways and he changes his direction.

There's a real lesson here to practice holiness. What does that mean? How do we practice holiness? Well, we're not perfect.

We mess up. But it's constantly assessing our character and our conduct and seeing if it matches up to what a holy God wants us to do. And if not, then like the writer says, we need immediate correction.

We need an immediate correction of our course. He says, hasten and not delay. You know, I was driving down the, I think it's the M6, the one past Carlisle one time.

[16:33] And not only was I late to somewhere, I was also running out of fuel. But I took the right turn off, so go me. And I was needing to turn away off into the Lake District.

And so I'm going around this big roundabout and I take the turn off, but then I end up back on the M6. So I continue going south. I'm late.

I'm running out of fuel. My friend's in the car. He's just laughing at me. He thinks the whole thing's hilarious. But you know, what do I do? Well, I realise my mistake. And do I just cruise on and end up in the south of England?

No. I want to get off, turn around and get back to where I'm meant to be as soon as possible. You know, it's a silly example, but that is how we should be.

When we realise, when we assess ourselves, hold on, when I'm going wrong, I need to turn around and I need to get back to where I'm meant to be. That is the lesson here.

[17:34] And in verse 61, though the wicked bind me with ropes, I will not forget your law. The writer, in difficult situations and testing times, he goes towards God, not away.

We need more of God, not less of God, more of God. So as well as knowing who God is brings us to action, we see surprising actions in difficult times.

Again, like the previous section, we have this sense of midnight and in this midnight, in the depth of the night, in the depth of the difficulties, he rises to praise in verse 62.

You know, you can't read this section without thinking about Paul and Silas. Now hopefully we know that story. If you don't, go and look up Acts 16. But you know, they were in the jail. They were in jail because of their love for the Lord Jesus and wanting to follow him.

But you know, even in that most depth of difficulty, they were singing praises to God. And hopefully you know the story about how that worked out. But what a witness that was to those around them in the jail.

[18:48] And what a witness that this, the writer has here to those around him because of his surprising actions in difficult times. His mind is on things above, not things that are going on around.

And as he does so, he brings fellowship into it. Verse 63, I am a friend to all who fear you, to all who follow your precepts.

Brotherly fellowship like Paul and Silas had with one another. They supported one another. They looked out for one another. And it is so important to look out for one another and support each other in these difficult times.

God's abundant, loving kindness is the motivation behind why we should want to live in this way and be faithful in our suffering. Verse 64, the earth is filled with your love, Lord.

Teach me your decrees. That is how we can remain faithful in suffering. Moving on to our third section, we have a bit of a shift.

[20:06] Learning through suffering. You know, maybe that seems slightly counterintuitive. There's a band called the Oh Hellos.

I don't know if anyone knows them. They're pretty small. Maybe not. You know, they're a... But I think they're a brother and sister from America and they're Christians, I believe. And they have this song called I Have Made Mistakes.

So you can tell what that's about. But the album is called Through the Deep Dark Valley. Again, that darkness is talking about suffering and it's talking about difficult times.

And in that song, they have a lyric and it goes like this. The sun, it does not cause us to grow. It is the rain that will strengthen your soul and it will make you whole.

You'll be thankful that I've not sang it to you, but you can listen to it later on. But what they're getting at there is that it is not the good times in that they have grown and learned. It is the bad times.

[21:06] It is the difficult times. It is the times of suffering. The times of difficulty. You know, in a plant point of view, yes, plants need sun but they also need rain, don't they?

It is that kind of thought. And in this section, we have the word teach in verse 66 and in 68. And we have the word learn in verse 71.

There's this real sense of teaching and learning going on in this section. But you know, it is paired with the word afflicted in verse 67 and 71.

Hence, learning through suffering. So what can we see here? Well, we can see that we should want to learn and to grow. Verse 66, the writer says, teach me knowledge and good judgment.

Good judgment, that is wisdom. Derek very helpfully laid out about Solomon, that wise king, the one who is given much wisdom. We should want good judgment and wisdom.

[22 : 15] You know, it is not just knowledge that we need. Who put their hand up for who wanted to be the cleverest person. You know, we probably all want to be clever, don't we? And knowing stuff is good.

But we need to know what to do with that knowledge. We need wisdom. The old adage goes, knowledge is that tomato is a fruit, but wisdom is not putting it in your fruit salad.

You know, it is an oldie, but it is a goodie. We need wisdom. We need to know what to do with our knowledge. Solomon was a great example of wisdom and how to deal with situations.

And yes, it is a gift from God. Yes, it is a gift from God, but mostly it just comes from experience.

Mostly it comes from living life. I don't know about you, but the wisest people I know are the oldest people I know.

It seems to go hand in hand. Life's experience gives us wisdom. And that is the benefit of a church where we can rub shoulders with those of different ages and stages and life experience.

[23 : 20] But you know, pray for wisdom as well. Pray that God, as Solomon did, would grant wisdom to us in our daily dealings with the people that we come across.

But we should want to learn and grow, but we should also know what we're asking for by doing so. We had that word, affliction. Well, it caused repentance and it taught lessons for the writer.

Verse 67, Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I obey your word. We're taught through difficult experiences.

Verse 71, It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees. You know, it's worth remembering in this that God is good.

The writer says that. In verse 68, he is not blaming God. He says, You are good and you do what is good. Teach me your decrees.

[24 : 24] The writer, he sees God's hand in the difficult situation that he finds himself in. And he says, God, you are doing what you are. You are good by definition.

And so what you do is good. God is not the cause of our difficulties, but he is willing and graciously he uses our difficulties to teach us and to help us grow.

He does so so that we can learn to be like him. Christians, it means to be Christ-like and so it means that we need to learn to be like Christ. We are not automatically like him.

Verse 71, this affliction, you know, that my mind went to the refiner's fire. It's talked about elsewhere in the Bible. It's talked about in many songs and hymns.

But what is the refiner's fire? Well, you put a chunk of metal into a really hot furnace so that you get the pure metal out the other side.

[25 : 30] It is that thought that God uses a potentially bad thing for good. So we should know what we're asking for.

But you know also what's key is to ignore the world. though the arrogant, verse 69, have smeared me with lies, I keep your precepts with all my heart.

Their hearts are callous and unfeeling, but I delight in your law. The writer, his heart is in the right place. So he says, it doesn't matter what the others think.

He puts them to one side. He says, they are at fault, not me. They are callous and unfeeling, but he keeps the precepts of God.

Verse 72, the law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold. You know, I was curious about why it said thousands.

[26 : 34] I thought, that's not, it's quite a lot. It's not a huge amount, so he's put a limit on it. You know, if it was more than that, then, you know, maybe. But you know, that was the biggest word that they had for a number in the Hebrew language.

I actually looked it up as a piece of trivia for you, that the biggest word that we have for a number now is goggleplex. If anyone knew that, then well done, fair play.

That is the biggest word that we have for a number, and that is essentially what he is saying here. He is saying that there is nothing on earth, no riches, he would take over God's things.

The word of God is more precious to him than anything that you can even name or think of. That is what he is saying here. And what an amazing thing to say, yes, but to actually mean and to cherish and to have in your heart as you live your daily life.

So ignore the world, those naysayers, yes, but also the attractions of the world and go towards God's things.

[27 : 41] So we learn through suffering and keeping focused on God's goodness. And finally, we see reliance during suffering in our last section.

So what are we relying on? Is it our great knowledge at school? Is it our social status or our career? Is it Iron Brew gets you through?

Well, we need to remember our place, first of all. Verse 73, your hands made me and formed me. We are created beings. We are not creators or the creator. No, we are the creation. And that puts us in a place, so to speak.

You know, my version of that verse says this, God, you made me, so teach me your ways. When we remember who we are, that we are created beings, we should want to seek God out and the way that he thinks best for us.

[28 : 45] And hand in hand with that goes verse 74, may those who fear you rejoice when they see me, for I have put hope, I have put my hope in your word.

believers are called to shine for the Lord Jesus. You've seen guys like these on Princess Street, golf sale. This was a particularly funny one, I thought.

But you know, the obvious thing here is not the man hiding under the hood on a cold day. No, we don't know anything about him. The obvious thing is the golf sale, isn't it? He isn't trying to advertise how good he is as a billboard man or his background or whatever about him.

No, he is purely wanting to point people to the golf sale. You know, that is our call as Christians, to be signposts to the one who has done everything for us.

Why? Because the Lord Jesus can do everything for others. Make the love of God and his word that we have obvious in our lives.

[29 : 53] Testimony and witness to those around like we see in verse 74. So remember our place. Also to realise God's purposes.

Verse 75, a bit like the last section, he says this, I know, Lord, that your laws are righteous and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me. Seeing God in suffering, seeing his hand in it, well, it is a sign of spiritual maturity.

And I'm not saying that and saying that it is an easy thing through the difficult times to see God's hand in it. Often it is way later on we look back and see that God was using certain situations for our good.

But realising God's purposes and things. And as part of that, we remember his compassion. We remember his compassion that sustains us.

Verse 76, may your unfailing love be my comfort according to your promise. And in verse 77, God's purpose that he gives us life.

[31 : 07] Verse 77, let your compassion come to me that I may live. Yes, that we may live now and we may have life to the full as Jesus said, but also that we may live in that life to come that we are promised.

And finally, relying on God's help, reliance during our suffering. You might see and if you follow down verse 76 onwards, the first word in the NIV, you've got may, let, may, may, may.

That's not the name of the month. That is a petition to God. That is asking God for help. Why do we, why does he go to God for help?

You know, if you're in a difficult situation, you're going to phone someone who can actually do something about it, aren't you? That's why we phone the ambulances. That's why we phone the fire service. We speak to someone useful and God is the most useful person that we can turn to in our difficult times.

He is the one who can help and his, the things that he is asking for is for his unfailing love, his compassion, his justice for fellowship with other people which is so important.

[32 : 25] Do we pray for that? Do we pray for fellowship with other believers? How important it is to have other people around us in difficult times. And finally, in verse 80, he prays for purity.

A pure heart so that we don't have that shame it talks about at the end of falling into sin. Relying on God and on others is so important.

Hebrews 4.16, let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

We can rely on God, our creator, the one who made us and loves us and cares about us and has done everything for us to sustain us during our suffering.

We merely need to ask in prayer. So does Iron Brew get you through? Hopefully, you've not just ended the sermon craving for an Iron Brew and that's all you've taken from it.

[33 : 31] Plenty of other drinks available in the interest of fairness. But you know, does it get you through? Well, no. No is the answer. The next time you see one, I want you to think of some of the things we thought about this morning.

That the hope of eternity through trust in Jesus, well, it provides comfort for us while suffering. Also, that we can remain faithful in suffering by knowing God and keeping our minds on things above rather than things around.

that we can learn and become more God-like, more Christ-like through suffering. That we should desire growth despite the fact we know it might be painful.

And that we can rely on God, our creator, our sustainer, to help us and sustain us during our suffering. So let's ask, let's pray, let's trust things to Him.

Let me just pray and then we'll respond by singing a couple of hymns. God and Father, we thank You for Your Word.

[34 : 46] We thank You for the truth that we can find in it. We thank You that we have the whole Bible to study and to learn and we have many helpful commentaries and videos and all sorts to help us.

We thank You that You speak to us through Your Word. We thank You that we can learn so much from it. We thank You for the challenges contained.

We thank You that Your Word corrects us and puts us back on the right path. And so just help us as we consider these things that we've thought about from Psalm 119 this morning. We pray that through Your Holy Spirit that You will keep these things at the forefront of our minds and our hearts and that You will continue to speak to us this week as we dwell on these things.

So I ask Your blessing as we go. We pray that confidently because Your promises are faithful and so we pray that You will be with us, that You will go before us and that we will remember that hope that we have, that eternal hope because of the Lord Jesus, our living hope.

And so help us to live faithfully to Your Word in a response of love and it's in His most precious name we pray. Amen. Amen.