

# “Powerful Purpose Forever”

## (Part I)

Psalm 118.1-14

<sup>1</sup>Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
his love endures forever.

<sup>2</sup>Let Israel say:  
“His love endures forever.”

<sup>3</sup>Let the house of Aaron say:  
“His love endures forever.”

<sup>4</sup>Let those who fear the LORD say:  
“His love endures forever.”

<sup>5</sup>In my anguish I cried to the LORD,  
and he answered by setting me free.

<sup>6</sup>The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid.  
What can man do to me?

<sup>7</sup>The LORD is with me; he is my helper.  
I will look in triumph on my enemies.

<sup>8</sup>It is better to take refuge in the LORD  
than to trust in man.

<sup>9</sup>It is better to take refuge in the LORD  
than to trust in princes.

<sup>10</sup>All the nations surrounded me,  
but in the name of the LORD I cut them off.

<sup>11</sup>They surrounded me on every side,  
but in the name of the LORD I cut them off.

<sup>12</sup>They swarmed around me like bees,  
but they died out as quickly as burning thorns;  
in the name of the LORD I cut them off.

<sup>13</sup>I was pushed back and about to fall,  
but the LORD helped me.

<sup>14</sup>The LORD is my strength and my song;  
he has become my salvation.

[NIV]

HOPE  
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## I. Introduction

Och, it's a new kind of anxiety dream. This time it was not a matter of walking into the final exam without ever having been to class or doing the homework. (Are you listening, Sam?) Nor was it a matter of being somewhere without the proper clothes (or any at all). This time, it was looking at the clock and realizing I had been preaching for well over an hour... and then looking at the congregation and realizing that they had long since realized that I had been preaching for well over an hour. So how does the psalmist get away with saying things over and over and over? Would the congregation in my dream be upset if the psalmist went on over an hour calling them to say, “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever”?

The way I understand it, forgetfulness was not a problem Adam was created with. I believe forgetfulness is one of what we call the “noetic effects” of the fall. Our forgetfulness has two elements. One, degradation of the mind. Our minds and memories simply don't work right as they did when God made Adam and Eve. Two, corruption of the heart. Our hearts prefer and will *not* to remember heavenly things; *not* to set our minds on things above. You know how much easier it is to remember cinema lines than Scripture, or a hedonistic song than a hymn or a psalm.

One of the sweetest things for which we may thank the Lord, is that he never stops reminding us that his love endures forever. In heaven, we won't need this reminder on account of forgetfulness. We won't be forgetting things. But God will still remind us, because it is the food that sustains our eternal soul. Your soul will never get too full of this food. So, the psalmist first reminds us to remember God's Enduring Love. Then he relishes three freedoms arising from God's Enduring Love: Freedom from Fear, Freedom from Failing Refuge, and Freedom for Prevailing Love.

## II. Enduring Love

### A. Goodness

The foundation of all our freedom is God's Enduring Love. <sup>1</sup>“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.” What does “good” mean? Many of the words used to define “good” actually come from the word “good,” so they only show a different angle without giving a definition. “Benefit,” “blessing,” “improvement,” for example, all require that you know what “good” means. To receive a benefit is to receive some good result. To be blessed is to receive some good favor. To improve is to make something more good.

The Scriptures never tire of declaring God to be good. <sup>Ps34.8</sup>“Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.” <sup>Ps100.5</sup>“For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.” I could easily spend an hour on this, but I am anxious to move on. So let's just say that “goodness” is having a disposition toward something desirable... where “desirable” is measured by what *God* finds desirable and pleasing. That is, meeting a standard which *God* considers adequate. A good egg is one in which God is pleased; a bad apple is one in which God is displeased.

To say “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,” is NOT to say that we can determine or label God as good. He is good regardless of what we think or say about him. To say God is good is *nothing more* than to acknowledge the truth, the way things are as God sees them. It is a good thing that we do not have the job of determining what good is, and what bad is. We get them confused all the time. It's really quite simple: all things that are consistent with God's pleasure are good. All things that are not consistent with God's pleasure are bad.

To say, then, that “God is good; his love endures forever,” is to say that it is *good* that God’s love endures forever. Hardly a surprise, I suppose. But then again, the way we often prefer to think God’s love does *not* endure forever, makes me wonder if we don’t often think his love is *not* all that good. That is precisely the temptation to which Adam fell.

### **B. Love**

What is this “love”? (Do you have *another* hour?) Surely if we were to measure love by our standards, we would have reason to think his love is not all that good. It is a good thing that God alone determines what “good love” is. One thing is clear right up front: “Good love” is love that endures forever. The translation you are reading may use the word “mercy,” or “steadfast love,” or “lovingkindness” in place of “love.” I think they do that purposefully to clarify that “good love” is something far greater than what we usually let pass as love.

I’m going to make this very short. God’s love in Scripture is always linked to his faithfully keeping his covenant promises. His covenant promises are the things he has determined to do for the benefit of his own Son or of us. God’s love, then, is his unchangeable intent and work to improve our estate. <sup>Ps103.17</sup>“From everlasting to everlasting the LORD’s *love* is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children.” <sup>Mic7.18</sup>“Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show *mercy*.” <sup>Lam3.22</sup>“Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.”

The great proof of this eternally unchangeable intent and work to improve our estate, is the Son of God lowering himself to lift us up. Taking to himself a dreadful estate to improve ours. The Creator came, born of a created woman, lived in a fallen creation, and as a substitute suffered the penalty for our wretched claims that God’s love is not all that good. That is what our sins are: claims that God’s love is not all that good. Claims that we know better than God what is good for us. When we covet another person’s house, spouse, ability, or income, we claim God’s love is not good. We claim God should give *us* that house, spouse, ability, or income, if he really intends to improve our estate. Yet if we covet them, then *having* them could be the most *harmful* thing for us. If we covet them, it is because we trust in houses, spouses, abilities, or income to make us happy rather than in God himself.

The only way God could improve our estate was to pile upon his own Son all the penalty for our wicked claims. In this way he proved that our claims cannot and will not prevail over his intents and works. To the contrary, his intents and works to improve our estate *always* prevail over our claims that he cannot and will not to improve our estate.

Simply put, God wins. And that is good. Very good. It is the only hope we have for an improved estate. If he did not win over our wicked claims, then we’d be right, and we’d have no expectation of deliverance from our fallen, hell-bound estate. But God wins. Jesus arose from the dead. God was pleased with his sacrifice. God is now pleased with those who fear him—those who follow his precepts with great delight in his commands. That is, those who trust and delight in what *God* says is good rather than what *man* says is good. God wins. God’s love prevails. Even death could not hold God’s love down, could not keep God’s love from prevailing. Even death cannot thwart God’s intent and work to improve our estate.

### **C. Implications**

There are some immediate implications of this. One, God’s unchanging intent and work to improve our estate are the grounds for intercessory prayer. Daniel, in his great prayer for the Israelites captive in Babylon, began the prayer: <sup>Dan9.4</sup> “O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of *love* with all who *love* him and obey his commands...” At length he closes the prayer, <sup>18</sup>“Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that

bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great *mercy*. <sup>19</sup>O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.” God’s unchanging intent and work to improve the estate of his people honors God. God wins. When you desire something from God, first make sure that God would win by doing it. If so, he’ll do it.

If God will win and improve your estate by making your neighbors your friends, then he’ll do it. But if God will improve your estate by making them your enemies so that you will love God more, then he will do it.

Two, God’s unchanging intent and work to improve our estate are the grounds for returning to the Lord in repentance. Joel urged God’s people, <sup>Joel 2.12</sup>“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. <sup>13</sup>Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in *love*...” Being at peace with God is the greatest improvement in your estate; there can *never* be improvement in your estate as long as you are at war with God.

God wins. Turn to him and he will win over your sin. <sup>Ps 25.6</sup>“Remember, O LORD, your great mercy and *love*, for they are from of old. <sup>7</sup>Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your *love* remember me, for you are good, O LORD. God’s intent and work to improve our estate are the grounds for intercessory prayer and for returning in repentance.

And three, God’s unchanging intent and work to improve our estate are the grounds for our great purpose. <sup>Ps 89.1</sup>“I will sing of the LORD’s great *love* forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. <sup>2</sup>I will declare that your *love* stands firm forever, that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself.” God wins. His purpose stands. *This was Jesus’ purpose and it is our purpose: to make known the truth that God is building his kingdom and thereby improving our estate.*

God’s Enduring Love is the foundation of all our freedom. When Adam sinned, he chose to give up his liberty to enjoy an improving estate. The only way God could improve Adam’s estate after the fall, was to lay Adam’s estate of sin and misery upon his own Son Jesus. God did that upon the cross of Christ. For those who are God’s people; for those who minister to God’s people; yes for all who fear the Lord—who follow his precepts with great delight in his commands—God laid their estate of sin and misery upon his own Son Jesus Christ at the cross. At the same time, God gave to those who fear him the infinitely improved estate of peace with God and assurance of his love to everlasting. Let us say, “His love endures forever.”

### III. Freedom from Fear

Once we say, “His love endures forever,” we may enjoy the freedoms the psalmist expresses in vv5–14. First is the Freedom from Fear. <sup>5</sup>“In my anguish I cried to the LORD, and he answered by setting me free. <sup>6</sup>The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? <sup>7</sup>The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies.”

“He answered by setting me free,” can also be translated, “He answered and set me in a large place.” As in <sup>Ps 18.19</sup>“He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me.” Those who hate you will try to imprison you in terror and dread. Your sins hate you and imprison you in terror of judgment. God’s love breaks you out into a wide place, a meadow on a mountain where you can enjoy him rather than dread him. God’s love wins. God’s love prevails over those who hate you, including your own sins. He lays those sins upon Jesus. They terrorized him; now they are no longer upon you, so they cannot terrorize you.

What can man do to you? What can your sins do to you? God wins. He is your helper. You can look upon your enemies. “My enemies” is better translated “those who hate me.” God’s love prevails over their hatred for you. God’s mercy prevails over your sins’ power to kill you. That power killed Jesus instead of you.

Now you are free. The original text does not actually say, “I will look *in triumph* on those who hate me.” The translators added “in triumph.” Not bad, but I think it may distract. The real question the psalmist is developing, is “*to whom* are you going to look?” To the Lord who loves you, or to those who hate you? I say he is developing this question, because he answers it in the next verses. For now you are free. Before, in your prison of guilt, you could not see the Lord who loved you. You could not look to Him. Now you are in a big, broad place and you can see a love that prevails over your guilty prison full of fear. Is your prison of fear keeping you from initiating conversation during fellowship after worship? From telling your neighbor about Christ? From worshipping heartily during the collection? To whom will you look? God who loves you, or your fears that hate you?

#### IV. Freedom from Failing Refuge

Second, then, is the Freedom from Failing Refuge. Here in v8-9 is the answer to the previous question. <sup>8</sup>“It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. <sup>9</sup>It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.” I told you last fall how sick I felt when I saw a bumper sticker that read, “Got HOPE?” It was an advertisement for a presidential candidate. The implied message, of course, was “Trust in this candidate and you’ll get an improved estate.” I’ll take the psalmist’s answer, thank you very much. Yes, I have hope, and it is neither in man nor princes nor presidents.

Man and princes are failing refuge. People and princes may help your natural estate. People may help improve your wealth, princes may help improve your health... but as you are now seeing, that is not very likely. And they cannot improve your eternal, spiritual estate. Only God according to his great mercy can cause you “to be born again to a living HOPE through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” <sup>1Pe1.3-5NAU</sup>

#### V. Freedom for Prevailing Love

Thus we come to v10–14 where the psalmist exults in the third freedom when we say, “His love endures forever.” This freedom is the Freedom for Prevailing Love. It is the freedom to receive and enjoy God’s love prevailing over all our fears. <sup>10</sup>“All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the LORD I cut them off. <sup>11</sup>They surrounded me on every side, but in the name of the LORD I cut them off. <sup>12</sup>They swarmed around me like bees, but they died out as quickly as burning thorns; in the name of the LORD I cut them off. <sup>13</sup>I was pushed back and about to fall, but the LORD helped me. <sup>14</sup>The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.” So said Jesus upon the cross of crucifixion.

It is very clear the psalmist is saying, <sup>Ps115.1</sup>“Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.” The psalmist takes no credit. He is merely enjoying *being loved* by the Lord. The Lord intended and worked to improve the psalmist’s estate. The psalmist was helpless as the hateful nations surrounded him. But then the Lord <sup>Ps111.6</sup>“showed his people the power of his works, giving them the lands of other nations.”

Those enemies appeared formidable and threatening. They swarmed like bees, but their threat was extinguished like thorny brambles that flare up in hot flame and then fizzle and pop in ashes.

When Israel was being pushed back by the Egyptian army and almost fell into the Red Sea, God intended and worked to improve his people’s estate. God split the waters giving Israel dry ground on which to pass through to a large place, delivered from their imprisonment in Egypt. When those who hated them tried to follow and kill, God caused the waters to cover them and drown them. Israel freely enjoyed God’s love prevailing over their fears and over those who hated them. And Moses sang in Exo15.2 the same words the psalmist quotes: <sup>14</sup>“The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.”

Now, baptism is the sign and the guarantee for those who fear the Lord, that we are free to enjoy God’s love. God wins. On the Mount of Christ’s transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about Jesus’ Exodus which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem<sup>Lk9.31</sup>... meaning his death and resurrection. God wins. God sets us free, setting us in the big place of his love. God intended and worked to improve our estate, and he accomplished his purpose through the cross of his own Son.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Are you free? You were not born free, not a one of you. Has the Lord set you free from fear, from failing refuge; free to enjoy his love prevailing over you? Is the Lord your strength and your song? Has He become your salvation? Can you say, <sup>Ps34.4</sup>“I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears”?

Do you look upon all those who hate you as God looks upon them? I’m talking about the things you fear! I’m talking about your sins. I’m talking about your unworthiness. I’m talking about your wickedness. I’m talking about your ineffectiveness at the things you try to accomplish. I’m talking about your unsuccessfulness at work, at home, in raising your children. These things hate you and would imprison you in their guilt.

Who are you going to look at? The Lord whose love endures forever, or those who hate you? The Lord who intends and works to improve your estate, or those who intend and work to destroy you? Time for a reality check. See things the way God sees them. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good; his love endures forever. Take that to the memory bank every day, and go ahead... laugh joyfully all the way.