

Psalm 119.25–32

- ²⁵My soul clings to the dust;
give me life according to your word!
- ²⁶When I told of my ways, you answered me;
teach me your statutes!
- ²⁷Make me understand the way of your precepts,
and I will meditate on your wondrous works.
- ²⁸My soul melts away for sorrow;
strengthen me according to your word!
- ²⁹Put false ways far from me
and graciously teach me your law!
- ³⁰I have chosen the way of faithfulness;
I set your rules before me.
- ³¹I cling to your testimonies, O LORD;
let me not be put to shame!
- ³²I will run in the way of your commandments
when you enlarge my heart!

HOPE
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When Bruce asked me to do a series on this Psalm, I accepted the task with some eagerness – never really understanding the personal connection I would have with the psalmist – for the Lord has so constructed my personal walk to mimic the heart-path where David had trod – and He timed each meditation so perfectly as to be synchronized with my own personal cries and thanksgiving...

So I welcome you to mourn with me when I read vs. 25 – “My soul clings to the dust...” For we do so with anticipation of vs. 32 – “I will run...”

Bruce – next time please, ask for a 6-part series on Psalm 23.

Please step with me as we walk on the pebbled path towards heaven.

Note that this stanza starts with the D’s in the Hebrew alphabet. We see **depression**, in the spirit of **devotion**, **determination**, and **dependence**. There is no damnation or doom for the psalmist – but we see a discombobulated David whose drive is to dispose of the decoys so that he might double-time towards his delight. But we see first, he is depressed.

First - Depression

²⁵My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word!

There are few words to describe his sorrow. Every pursuit towards righteousness seems to have been placed into Calvin’s transmogrifier (Calvin of Hobbes, not Geneva) – and someone has hit the [persecution] button so that everything that comes out – everything that he enjoys – every sweetness – tastes like dust. And so we see David walking a straight line down a crooked road and he bumps into every impediment that man’s self-justifying motives can bring.

As a good king, David is desperate to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with his God. He so wants to bring life, but he is surrounded by the voices of those who would do otherwise. There might be loyal followers, encouragers, those that he can call friend – but (perhaps in his mind) there is doubt to their motives and all he hears as he prays these words are the loud voices of those who would destroy him.

It is at these moments – when you don’t trust everything you hear - someone might say even the kindest of words – but the psalmist (perhaps) only hears “come into my parlor said the spider to the fly...”

It is just at these moments, when one wants to cling to anything real – any firm knot at the end of the rope from which he dangles... Give me truth or else go away – don’t bother me.

David knows he cannot continue as King in the fetal position. He must hear “rise up and walk” - he must cling to the only thing that has the power to quicken his heart so that he might take the next step, and the next, and the next.

And so David cries out – “Give me life according to your word!” I noticed there is an exclamation mark at the end of this first verse. It might lead you to believe it is much like the scene of a Mel Gibson movie, where he pierces the air with a guttural cry, “FREEDOM!” Though I am inclined to believe his lips are barely moving and that it is the desperate cry of his heart. His heart screaming out what his lips have lost the strength to do.

Perhaps you have never had the opportunity to mourn this way; having the life experience that comes from this form of sorrow. Maybe you have. I hope not. And yet, the treasure that arises from such painful providences is there to be savored and even enjoyed – in due time. Though I don’t tritely share this thought with anyone going through it; for I think they would much rather have a silent servant than a wordy visitor.

Wordy visitors tell mourners how they should feel. Silent servants love the mourner where they are at. But that is another sermon.

Today we are looking at someone who has come to the end of himself. – which according to scripture is a very good thing. This is not to diminish the reality or pain of suffering, but rather it helps us come to that place with the realization of how God uses suffering to refine his people.

Suffering gives us an awareness of our limitations, it removes those things that obscure our view of Christ, it tests the integrity of the work of Holy Spirit in our lives, and fuels our determination to live forward and press on. (REPEAT)

But this is not just about what suffering does for US. It is also helps us gain perspective on Christ’s suffering; King David, being a type of Christ is a mere shadow of the King of Kings and to the cross he bore. So suffering in Christ glorifies God by directing us towards his son.

But there is more; David – after coming to the end of himself, is still able to make determinations. His mere asking for life is evidence that there is life already in him. He could have asked for a dagger– but rather, his view is ever forward. Hope (confident expectation) is proof of life.

There is a spirit-filled eagerness infused with circumstantial haste that urges him forward. This is not of his own power. For that is also what affliction does – it makes us aware of the interaction our lives have with the one who dwells inside of us). Yes, He dwells inside of us.

¹ *“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”*

¹ 1 Corinthians 3:16 (English Standard Version)

The Spirit's work is not there to make us guess what he is about to do a month from now, rather He gives us new life, firmly plants that in the form of belief, and gives us a vision as to where we need to go (through the law) – with our eyes looking up towards heaven – and Christ, who perfectly obeyed that law. He tells us what basis we have for that life and how much solid ground we have to stand on.

This hit me when Bruce referred, on Sunday, to Acts 11:18, which says, *“then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”* It is, in essence, the key to this stanza. For we read at the end (vs32); *“when you enlarge my heart, I will obey your commands...”* So Holy Spirit is giving us insight into the interaction between God and man...and it is very much present on the mind of David who does not boast of his own strength. He makes that clear in the first verse; he has no strength on his own.

That is the context of the 2nd verse, v.26., *“when I told of my ways.”* Here David is not suggesting that God was responding to David's call. Rather it is clearly the other way around. David was responding to God's inner dwelling.

There appears to be an extreme awareness that God is the agent of David's confession. David is saying, *“When I confessed my sin you forgave me – teach me your ways...”* He is talking about the relationship He has with God, whereby he asks for forgiveness and God grants it.

Just as asking for forgiveness shows that David has an expectation that God will forgive him....that expectation is fueled by the promise that God made, and the belief in that in that promise is a gift of God, so we can also conclude that confession is proof of life – and of the Holy Spirit's dwelling in us.

So here we have one good thing to be aware of when we are downcast...if our grief takes us to the cross, we are already on our way out from turmoil. God is in you.

Therefore, we can conclude that it is better to be melted with grief than to be hardened by impenitence. Imagine, if you were suffering, that all hope was removed. Can you imagine that; pain, with no hope of relief? Sounds like hell.

We have escaped that horrible condition.

God dwells in his people – our confessions help us know He is there. Our confession is evidence of His inner dwelling. Assurance.

Nothing brings more ease and more life to a man than a frank acknowledgment of the evil inside of him; the sin, which has caused his own sorrow and lethargy. His confession proves he knows his own condition, and that the blinders are off to his own pride.

AND Our confessions are not meant to make God know our sins, but to know them ourselves – and to watch the Lord do his work. We nail them to the cross and receive the benefits of grace.

Much of the work of sanctification is the “knowing;” the gaining awareness of how just how much God has to do with our salvation and how little we had to do with it.

“And you answered me.” His confession had been accepted – and the sins forgiven.

If you see don’t see the trend yet, I’ll gladly repeat it.

Doctrine: God dwells in his children and designs their path so that they can glorify and enjoy Him.

Sometimes in low, sometimes high to help us know that God is nigh.

We have this reasonable soul inside of us and it belongs to Christ. There is a marriage between the new man in you and God himself. It can never be divorced.

If you are His, He dwells in you.

If this does not encourage you, I do not know what would. For think of David’s sorrow; do you not know that God wept with him? I mean, His son was being persecuted for His namesake.

Remember what Jesus said to Paul:

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.²

While Saul was beating God’s chosen, he was beating Christ. When he was obeying the law on his own power, he was neglecting Christ. So – much later when the scales fell from his eyes...he could see Christ dwelling inside of him now.

Tell me that doesn’t say something about how God lives through His people. When we are persecuted, as we believe David was - when he wrote this, it was God who was being persecuted. As David’s soul clings to the dust, His savior is right there with him.

David is mourning. God is mourning. David’s confession is brought on by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. God is the primary agent of David’s confession.

God is also the granter of forgiveness.

God dwells in His children and designs their path so they might glorify and enjoy Him. And when he sees fit to bring painful providences, He lives with us while we go through them.

David asks; how do I move forward when I keep stumbling?

² Acts 9:4,5

He goes to the well to get more water; he says, "God, you are the source of life in me, so please – give me more. And help me up. Help me live according to your promise."

More life is the cure for all ailments.

Perhaps David remembered the word of the Lord in Deuteronomy 32:39, where Jehovah claims both to "kill and to make alive," and he asks the Lord to exercise that life-giving power upon David when he is in the dust.

"As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust."³

Now David did not have as many rich promises to rest upon as we have; but even a single word was enough for him, and we see him asking for that "*according to thy word.*" "Just give me a word of encouragement...help me see my bright future," which is so veiled.

It's awesome to see a believer in the dust who is pleading the promise, "quicken me," with confident expectation that it will be done.

In the earlier stanza, while in a happy state he begs for bounty, but when he is in the dust he prays for quickening. Life is, in both cases, the object of pursuit: that he may' have life, and have it more abundantly.

Truly this is wisdom. Fools hunger for more wine, and yet they lose their life; but the wise man knows that the life is more than meat and potatoes. When we pine for riches and neglect our souls, we fall into the trap that is ever present in the world.

To neglect our souls is to forget the promise. We see David here -fanning into flame, the gift of God...⁴ The gift is there. Enjoy it.

The prudent man seeks eternal treasure.

Eternal treasure is found in the word, quickened upon our hearts.

²⁷Make me understand the way of your precepts, and I will meditate on your wondrous works.

Again – God dwells in his people and is the primary agent of our understanding – otherwise, David would not be wasting what little strength he has asking for understanding. "Throw me the rope...." He says... Help my mind wrestle with my circumstances.

³ Psalm 103: 13,14

⁴ 2 Timothy 1:6

Don't you just love hearing people quote scripture to support the most ridiculous things? Like those churches where they suggest prairie dresses.

But God doesn't cater to the ridiculous. He gives us a promise and then helps us understand that promise and then helps us cling to that promise, then he helps us live to that promise.

"Make me understand" – "Then I will..." who's on first here. The cry alone is evidence of God's inner work. The cry alone is evidence that David is already beginning to understand the order of things. Crying for understanding is understanding. It drives us forward towards life – action. Then I will...

But it's not a 1-shot deal...the quickening isn't like the electronic shock given to Frankenstein – so that he is now self governing. Again, God dwells in his people. There is constant interaction – an eternal marriage that is to be enjoyable right now.

The marriage gives strength in the now:

²⁸My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word!

This is real pain he's feeling.

Note how David records his inner soul-life. In verse 20 he says, "My soul breaks;" in verse 25, "My soul clings to the dust"; and here, "My soul melts." Further on, in verse 81, he cries, "My soul longs; in 167, "My soul keeps your testimonies"; and lastly, in 175, "Let my soul live."

David is all soul. He is advancing his soul at all times and especially in despondent times. What a difference there is between the spiritually living and the spiritually dead!

Maybe it is just at these low points that we are given the most opportunity to see the new man inside more clearly. If my journals are not promptly burned after my death, someone might read them and think the worst – for I pour out my soul in writing mostly when I am in pain – though they might think the best as that is when I am most diligent in the word. I hate to say it, but during happy times, I am more lethargic in the attention I pay to my soul. A reader might get a horribly skewed version of the real self, though what they might also see is when the Lord was doing the most refining.

There is also an encouragement that the Lord will not allow his people to ignore him. He pursues his bride – He dwells in his bride – and He will have your attention. He just so happens to have the entire universe at His disposal as tools to get your attention...and so we might want to get with the program – which isn't a program. It's a person.

And I'm not just talking about your walk – but also the church – maybe the country – maybe the continent... Take note: when you see suffering, God might be doing serious work to advance his kingdom.

Shipbuilders build ships, but they can't enjoy their work if they don't set them in the water to test its integrity. When they float, they get the thrill of seeing their handiwork. Just so with God's people. He does a work in you, and then he shows that work in you – watching you float.

Look at Africa, China - places where there is little freedom to worship – yet our ranks grow and grow.

You can be encouraged in despondent times – God is testing his handiwork - He is fashioning love inside of you – watering it – and making it grow.

David's soul is like water – he melts. Yet God dwelling in him – drives him to the promise of future grace.

So David says

²⁹Put false ways far from me and graciously teach me your law!

Just so the promise keeps him alive, David wants to put away those distractions. He wants to look forward not backward – where to look back will bring only discouragement. In Luke 17:32 Jesus simply says "Remember Lot's Wife" using her as a warning to professing Christians to not turn back to their sin after leaving it. According to Wikipedia, J.C. Ryle devotes a chapter to her in his work, Holiness

Yet it is not enough for David to choose not to sin, he wants to be far from it. He asks God to keep it as far from me as possible. Again, David is aware of what he will become if left to his natural desires.

He needs God to change those desires.

I will let you meditate on vs. 30,31 on your own – so that I might get to the last.

³⁰I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I set your rules before me.

³¹I cling to your testimonies, O LORD; let me not be put to shame!

There is much meat to be digested...but then we get to this.

³²I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart!

Who's on first here. When will David run? When God enlarges his heart. Who is the first mover here?

This verse is the key. This is no longer a question, David asking God to enlarge his heart. He is counting on it. He has already asked. The question is evidence that God is already working. David not only sees that, but he sees the promise and the promise is already being fulfilled before he finishes his meditation.

He catches a glimpse of heaven in his mind and waits. It is a declaration that “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”⁵

If you are his...whatever your circumstance, God is dwelling in you. He can quench your thirst with dew or mildew, happy or sad providences, riches or want. The marriage has already begun, the kingdom is already here and we its citizens. He dwells in you and you will glorify him.

Do you hear that? Do you believe that? If only a little bit – there is evidence. He is there. Rise up and walk.

⁵ Phillipians 1:6