

Psalm 119:81–88
I'm at the End of My Rope!

Tuesday, July 23, 2024 • Read Psalm 119:81–88

Questions from the Scripture text: What is the psalmist's soul doing (v81a)? For what? In what does he hope (v81b)? What is happening to his eyes (v82a)? From what? What has he been searching the Word to ask (v82b)? To what does he compare himself in v83a? What has He still not done (v83b)? What does he ask in v84a? What is he looking forward to at the end of these days (v84b)? Upon whom will He execute judgment? What have the proud done to him (v85a)? What did they violate (v85b)? What is true of God's commandments (v86a)? But what is true of his attackers (v86b)? What does he want from God (v86c)? What have the persecutors nearly done (v87a)? But what has the psalmist still not done (v87b)? What does He ask God to give him in v88a? According to what? In order to do what (v88b)?

What can a believer do when he is at the end of his rope? Psalm 119:81–88 looks forward to the opening portion of morning public worship on the coming Lord's Day. In these eight verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that, **even at the end of his rope, the believer must persist in crying out to God for the life he needs to keep searching God's Word and keeping the testimonies of God's mouth.**

At the end of his rope, v81–84. The agony in these verses is intense. "faints" (v81a) is translating a word that means his soul has been entirely consumed in looking for relief from God. Still, he hasn't given up. It would be wicked to look for salvation elsewhere, and wickedly unbelieving to give up as if there wasn't hope for it with God.

It's not just baby believers who end up like this. The psalmist knows what he should do: look to God for comfort by way of His Word! The problem is that this is exactly what he has been doing, and he still hasn't found relief. It's not just that his soul is consumed; the same word is now translated "fail" with respect to his eyes (v82a).

Our eyes have been created to behold God's manifold works of goodness and wisdom, but especially to behold God's Word. I hope, dear reader, that this is how you like to use your eyes. Isn't it marvelous? God has given us physical organs by which we may look at His Word! The psalmist has been looking for God's comfort in God's comforting Word, but alas! He has not been able to obtain the comfort that he knows is there.

Recently, in studying Mt 9:17, we thought about how wineskin bottles begin as pliable and slowly firm in their shape. But a wineskin that is too close to fire, or exposed to smoke, could dry out too quickly, with shrinkage in undesirable ways, and become too brittle (and, if used for wine, burst because the wine is still fermenting!). This is how the psalmist feels about his life—prematurely dried out and unable to fulfill his function (v83a). Still, he is looking to God's Word not just for comfort (v82) but for direction (v83), especially in his distress and despair.

Finally, the question in v84a isn't just a random inquiry about the length of his life. Combined with v84b, it becomes apparent that the psalmist knows what three thousand subsequent years of believers have experienced: sometimes we don't get justice in this life. The psalmist trusts the Lord; he continues to call himself "Your servant." But as a finite creature, he doesn't know how long he can bear up under the attacks. So it is natural that he cries out to know how long this might end up lasting.

It is important to learn from this verse that it is permissible to raise our complaint to God—to express to Him our agony and difficulty under His providence. This is very different from complaining against Him, whether to others, in our hearts, or even to Him Himself. All of these are wicked, and we know it. The godly heart might be confused by his remaining sinfulness and tendency to complain against God: can it be right to tell God how hard on us His providence is? So for three thousand years, the Lord has given to His people this Psalm to sing, pray, and learn from.

But not at the end of his resources, v85–88. When the believer's experience, and especially his own heart, is letting him down, there is one place of recourse: God Himself. As the proud persecutors have been plotting against ("digging pits for," v85a) him, it has been against God's faithful law (v85b, v86b). v86a literally says, "All Your commandments are faithfulness." Here is something that we can always rely upon: God's Word is as faithful as He is.

This is why the psalmist is sure that the persecutors will be judged (v84b), and why he refuses to abandon living according to God's Word Himself. God's justice guarantees that help will come—though perhaps, as we observed in v84, only after death.

Still, God Himself is the help. When the believer is at the end of his rope, he is not at the end of his resources. The strength that we have is limited, but we are not a closed system. In fact, we are continually sustained by the Lord. So being at the end of our rope does not mean that we are at the end of our resources. For, God Himself is our great Resource!

This gives rise to one of the most honest Christian prayers there is: "Help me!" It's grievous that "God help me" has become a byword to so many, when it is a proper watchword for the believer. Dear reader, may it be a reflex of your heart to look to the Lord (and cry to Him!) for help as often as you feel your need of it. Not just when it feels like other resources have failed, but in every use of the means that He Himself has given and supports.

There is a glimmer (however small) of hope even in the statement of v87a. Those who have almost made an end of him are on the earth. But God is in heaven! Just as He is constant in faithfulness, so also He is almighty in power. And with the fullness of His divine being, His covenant love ("lovingkindness," v88a) bends itself devotedly, unwaveringly, unstoppably upon the objects of God's eternal, electing affection.

"Revive me" is literally "make me live"! Every creature lives every moment only by the goodness of God (cf. Ps 104). He makes all men live. In Him, we live and move and have our being (cf. Ac 17:28). For the believer, His making us live comes not only in His ordinary goodness to all the creatures, but in the covenant love that brought us to faith in the first place.

Finally, note the primary purpose for which the believer desires this life to be continued to himself: "so that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth." He is not again asking for some idea of how long this will be, or for the judgment to fall now on the persecutors (though such requests are appropriate). His primary desire is that he might continue to keep God's Word.

Why? Not just because it is morally and judicially right or even covenantally obligatory, but because it is personal. It is "the testimony of Your mouth." It is breathed out by this God Who has made the saint and loved the saint and redeemed the saint. And this is the great thing that he hopes to do with the life that the Lord continues to him: to keep that personal testimony that has personally come from the Lord's "mouth." Keeping God's Word isn't just moral; it's personal. If you are reading this or hearing this, the Lord is continuing to you your life. Isn't He doing so in order that you might know Him and His love to you and devote your own life to the keeping of His Word?!

When have you felt like your soul was used up, your eyes were used up with looking in the Bible for help, and your life was dried up and brittle? How much of your inner thought life and interaction with God is a crying out to Him for help? How are you making it the great project of the life that He has continued to you that you would "keep the testimony of His mouth"?

Sample prayer: Lord, when all our soul, our eyes, our life are used up in looking for comfort from Your word, still, our hope is in You. Help us! All Your commandments are faithfulness, and all of Scripture is the personal testimony that has been breathed out by You. So, in Your steadfast, covenant love, continue to us, now, our life. And grant that we would devote that life to keeping the testimony of Your mouth—offering worship to You by Your own grace, that we might live entire lives of worship unto You by that same grace, through our Lord Jesus Christ, in Whose Name we ask it, AMEN!

Suggested songs: ARP119K "My Soul Is Fainting" or TPH119K "My Soul for Your Salvation Yeams"

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

Psalm 119 Verses 81-88. These are God's words. My soul faints for your salvation but I hope in your word. My eyes fail from searching for your word. Saying, when will you comfort me? For I have become like a wineskin in Smoke. Yet, I do not forget your statutes. How many are the days of your servant?

When you will execute judgment, when will you How many are the days of your servant? When will you execute judgment on those who persecute me? The proud have Doug Pitts for me, which is not according to your law. All your Commandments are faithful. They persecute me wrongfully. Help me.

They almost made an end of me on Earth.

All right. We'll wait and then we'll start over. Is it a UPS? Something. Comes up the car. We got an early warning from Natty when they got into the parking lot and then they came up here. Are we still online? We are, it's FedEx. It'll be done in a second.

So it's not like the neighbor. Or something. Just that needs our attention. Thank you, John. All right. Let's start over. Psalm 119, beginning in verse 81. These are God's words. My soul faints for your salvation. But I hope in your word. My eyes fail from searching, your word saying, when will you comfort me?

For I have become like a wine skin and smoke. Yet, I do not forget your statutes. How many are the days of your servant? When will you execute judgment on those who persecute me? The proud have dug pits for me, which is not according to your law. All your Commandments are faithful.

They persecute me wrongfully. Help me. They're almost made an end of me on Earth. But I did not forsake your precepts. Revive me according to your loving kindness. So that I may keep The testimony. Of your mouth. Hey man, thus far the reading of God's inspired and inerrant word.

Several previous sections.

We have heard about Affliction. And even Affliction at the hands of those who are the proud Uh, who persecute the psalmist, verse 69, the proud have forged a lie against me two sections ago. Last week's section, let the proud be ashamed for they treated me wrongfully in verse 78.

Then this week's section, the proud have Doug Pitts for me, which is not according to your law and so forth. And so, there is This running theme. Now, through several stanzas of this Psalm About being afflicted by those who are the proud humanly speaking. But there's a parallel theme a superintending theme.

Uh, even above that of what the wicked do. Just, as Joseph said you intended it for evil. Uh, the greater intention. The more significant narrative at the time as God intended it for good. So we have Uh, verse 67 and Verse 71 from two weeks ago, Verse 67 before I was afflicted, I went astray but now I keep your word.

Verse 71 it is good for me, that I have been Afflicted that I may learn your statutes. And then last week God's Own personal. Uh, goodness. Verse 75, I know o, Yahweh that your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness, you Have Afflicted me. Well. It is. Merciful of the Lord to give us these things to read and think and pray and sing.

And yet. Um, In our turning to him in our, using his word and are depending upon him. It can be a long. And literally exhausting trial, exhausting does not mean tiring. When something, when a supply is exhausted, it runs out. And it can be an exhausting trial to be afflicted.

And that is the theme of the first three verses of this stanza of the psalm when it says, my soul faints for your salvation. The word faint there is being used in. An older sense. Not to feel really tired. Like I feel faint. Um but to run out of strength, someone who faints would fall unconscious.

The Hebrew word behind it means something that is completely consumed. So, my soul is consumed. Uh, longing for your salvation. Is the idea? But I hope in your word. Okay, so My soul has been hoping in your word. And I'm continuing to hope in your word. But I'm just about out.

I am at the end. My soul faints for your salvation. But I hope any word. So how has he been hoping in your word? 82, my eyes fail from searching. Your word that is my eyes grow dim or my eyes grow blind. So in verse 81 he says I've used up all my soul, desiring your salvation, I'm still hoping in your word.

But even hoping in his word he's used up all his eyes. Longing for his salvation from God's word. I've my eyes fail from searching. Your words saying, when will you comfort me? So he goes to God's word for Then he reads and he searches but he is unable to draw.

The comfort that he needs. And he's still doing what's right. He's still looking to God for that Comfort. He does not saying that he can find Comfort somewhere else. So he turns away from the word, he's not saying that there isn't comfort in God's word. No, he's saying there is Comfort, but there is lack in me.

My soul is unable to get this Comfort in my eyes. Are running out and unable to get this Comfort. Um, He feels like one who is aged prematurely or withered or brought to An end of the life that is in himself. Prematurely verse 83, for I have become like a wine skin in Smoke.

Now, we had this not too long ago, we talked about the wine and the wine skins and The new wine that was still fermenting needed. To be put in a used wine skin. That was still pliable and expandable. Um, But the wine that was old wine. That had completed the full fermentation process.

All the sugar has been eaten up by the yeast and so forth. Uh, that it's okay. That the wine skin. Over time loses its pliability dries out becomes rigid. In this particular case he's talking about Not just has he dried up so that there's no life. There's no flexibility left in him.

As he feels dried up and shriveled and brittle. Like the wine skin that has dried up and turned into a bottle but that it has been artificially accelerated by the smoke. So here's a wine skin that was left in a place where it was exposed to a fire. That was too nearby.

And it got and the fire of the Affliction has dried the life out of it. So that there's no life left in it. It's not able to function as it's supposed to And if the wine isn't done fermenting, it's also You know, hopefully this is a water bottle uh in this particular case but if there was wine in it that wasn't done fermenting it drying out too quickly.

Uh may make it unable to serve its function, may even cause it to burst and break. Um, so very, very strong images. In verses 81 to 83, and yet, he continues knowing and being sure. That there is actual comfort and that it is in God. Although, Verse 84 is very sobering.

He might not get it until he dies. So verse 84, when he says, how many are the days of your servant, it's actually tied to the second half of the verse, when will you execute judgment on those who persecute me? So he's kind of resigned himself. To, to the idea and This is true.

It happens sometimes. That the righteous are Afflicted, all the days of their life. Or they are persecuted in this particular case, those who persecute me, they are persecuted even unto death. So he's looking to God. As his comfort. But he's understanding that. It might not cut, it might not come, until the end of his days.

Maybe he's going to be persecuted unto death and now he's, he's asking the Lord. How many of these persecuted days? Do I have to live? He knows just judgment and

Justice are coming. When will you execute judgment on those who persecute me? But he feels like he cannot bear the length of the time.

That it takes to get there. Yeah, one of the Uh, repeated refrains of wise pastors and Bible expositors. Although it be a wicked sin to complain about God. It is a righteous Habit, to complain to God. To cry out to him with the difficulty of your situation. Obviously not to accuse him of anything.

But to tell him, I know what you are like, and I know that there is Grace and there is Comfort, but I cannot get it. And here is the situation I am in and here is How depleted? And used up are my soul and my eyes, my and my life.

Uh, Verse 81 verse 82 verse 83 And then he starts describing the difference again. Between the proud who are persecuting him and the Lord who is afflicting him in faithfulness. The proud have dug pits for me, which is not according to your law. Okay, so Uh, they have done this.

Um, It has come in God's faithfulness, but God's Commandments are also faithful. And he knows that the proud are going to be judged. Because God gives his law and God punishes those who break it. He's true. Verse 84 God is going to execute judgment on those who persecute him.

And so sometimes we have to remind ourselves when people do things that are against God's law, There's hell to pay for that. There is literal hell to pay for that. And when we don't see it, come for a while. Sometimes we just have to remind ourselves from the Bible.

That it's true. It is All your Commandments are faithfulness. They persecute me wrongfully. Help me. Okay, so He is able to bring God's law. To the god of the law. And to say, look, Your Commandments are I agree with your law. Their behavior is against your law. And says, they almost made an end of me on the Earth but I did not forsake your precepts.

Meaning, he didn't give up. He didn't say, well righteousness is vain. Like ASAP almost did in the beginning of Psalm 73. Well, in vain, have I kept my hands clean. And say it's not worth it. He said. God's Commandments are faithful. God, and the word really is faithfulness. All your Commandments are faithfulness in verse 86.

It is faithful of God himself. Uh, to give us these Commandments and he is sticking to them no matter what. But he feels like he's done, he's at the end of his rope. And yet. Our soul and our eyes. And our life verses 81, 82 and 83. And especially the last one life that is the subject in verse 88.

Although they are limited in quantity. They are not limited in Source. Because God continues to extend life to us. So it's not like you have a limited amount of life in your soul and when it runs out, that's it. Uh, We have an income as it were. And the income is the grace of our God.

Who continues to give us life. And so that ends up being You know, there's there's a bunch of his expressing, what his situation was like, But really there are Um, two main requests for himself. Help me. And give me life verse 88, very literally give me life according to your concept, according to your steadfast love, so that I may keep the testimony.

Of your mouth. Yes, he is praying and Desiring. That God would execute judgment on the persecutor, but he doesn't know if that's going to happen. In this life. And he doesn't know how many more days. He's gonna need to have life to seek God's word. Note that he's not even asking for life to be able to resist.

The persecutor or endure the persecutor. Verse 88. He said I don't even have any life left for trying to keep the testimonies of your mouth. I don't even have any life left for reading. My Bible and getting comfort from my Bible. My eyes fail from searching. Your words saying, when will you comfort me?

So even for me to keep on looking for comfort, in your word, I need more life than I currently have. Give me more O, Lord. And that. Um, the circumstance that Yeah, this is 3 000 years old. And it was surely true before that as well. But for 3 000 years, God has given his Saints.

This Psalm. To pray and to sing. Because his Saints have experienced this. Over and over again. And one and after another's life. And the Lord has been faithful. Everyone who has been his, who has gone through this, who has come to the end of themselves, even being able to, uh, look in his word.

Uh, he has given life as their days. So, their strength was They didn't know how many there were. But God did. And he gave new strength for each day. And he brought them out of their Affliction. And he executed judgment on their persecutors. There's 3 000 years of persecutors on the other end of this.

Every one of them have. Had their sin judged with God's Wrath. Some of them have even been converted and their sin was judged and punished at the cross. Which was no small expression of God's Wrath. And so, when you feel like you are running out, Of. The life, like you're dried up.

And that's it. There's no moisture left. You may still cry out to Gond with this portion of his word. Praying it and singing it. And by his Mercy. Having your heart conformed. More to it by hispara. Let's pray.

Father, how often? You have given us. Just the portion of your word that we needed. For what we're in or what we were coming to. And we thank you for. Here. Then Matthew and in numbers. In the psalm of the month, which was actually selected years ago for this month.

And, We bless your name, Lord. Before how frequently you remind us. That you are personally. Uh, interacting with us. That, although our soul. Eyes, our life has run out yours. Cannot. And your grace in which you give yourself to be ours. Does not. And so come Lord, give us more life.

According to your loving, kindness, according to your Covenanted, love your cassette. That we may keep the testimony of your mouth. That we may keep searching your word. Looking for your comfort. Be. Oh God. Our comfort. Be our strength, be our life. Be our joy. Help us O Lord. Be able to take more joy from you.

Open wide our hearts. To have your love to us poured in by the spirit. Uh, so that The afflictions, which you are faithful to take us through. Would themselves be diminished by comparison? We thank you for our dear brother. Repeats to himself all day, long light, and momentary Affliction.

To remind himself that there is an eternal weight of Glory. Waiting for us. But we pray that some of that eternity and some of that weight. Uh, would be Applied to our experience now. That your spirit would give us to know your greatness. That your spirit would give us.

Uh, appetite and the spiritual digestion, the capacity to The light in. Please help us O Lord, we pray. In Jesus name. Amen.