

**THE COMFORTING WORD**  
**PSALM 119:49-56**

I'm not sure who did the research, but someone came up with a list of "America's Top 99 Problems." A few samplings from the list:

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|---------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| 99. Terrorism                   | 52. Crying babies   | 9. The misguided war on drugs                            |
| 97. Peeling paint               | 48. Bureaucracy     | 8. Mass extinction of animals                            |
| 93. Snakebites                  | 47. Alzheimer's     | 7. Loneliness  |
| 86. Ugly clothes                | 41. Alcoholism      | 6. Cancer  |
| 81. Nothing good to watch on TV | 32. Student debt    | 5. A loss of perspective on what is and is not important |
| 79. Light pollution             | 27. Unemployment    | 4. Heart disease   |
| 76. Airline delays              | 20. Homelessness    | 3. Global warming  |
| 65. Orbiting space pollution    | 19. Rampant obesity | 2. Poverty   |
| 63. Credit card fraud           | 14. Suicide         | 1. Sellouts  |
| 62. Cultural snobbery           | 10. Too many guns   |  |

I get it. It's a survey and it's designed to stimulate discussion, but I think most of us have more pressing personal problems and concerns than most of those. We are concerned about:

- ✓ How to discipline a teenager who is suddenly out of control
- ✓ How to survive when a wife of 20 years has found another man and left
- ✓ How to make the next house and car payments
- ✓ What to do when a job was lost a week before Christmas and I'm too old to start another career and too young to retire
- ✓ Parents who are aging and remain resistant to the gospel
- ✓ Trying to live graciously and humbly with neighbors and family mocking us for our faith
- ✓ What the doctor will say at our next check up after a test revealed an anomaly

We all have events and circumstances in our lives that tempt us to lie awake at night in anxiety and entice us to find various kinds of escapes. Where will you turn with your problems? Now you are in church this morning and the answer is obviously self-evident. "I'll go to God." But really — where will you turn and what will be your comfort? What will calm your mind and ease your fears? What will enable you to continue to live with your problems but not be overcome with anxiousness and anger?

In the seventh stanza of Psalm 119, the psalmist reminds us that God has given us His Word for our comfort and hope. Our hope is not in escaping our problems. Our comfort is not being relieved of our troubles. Our comfort is in being faithful to the Word of God and finding God to be faithful to us in every one of our troubles.

The psalmist will exhort us in this stanza that —

*WHEN WE ARE AFFLICTED BY TRIALS, OUR ONLY HOPE IS GOD AND HIS WORD.*

Let me remind you about Psalm 119. It is the longest Psalm (and chapter) in the Bible — 176 verses. It is made up of 22 8-verse stanzas — one stanza for each consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And within each section, each line begins with that letter of the alphabet, as a means to help the hearers remember and memorize the psalm (that's why many of your Bibles have words you may not know between each of these sections — those are the letters of the Hebrew alphabet).

We do not know who the author of this psalm is, but we do know that he understands the realities of trouble in life (we'll see that this morning) and at the same time he has a deep love for the Word of God. The psalmist's love for the Scriptures — and the God of the Scriptures — is paramount. One commentator says,

He constantly cries out to God, retreats into his shadow, and finds solace in his strength. This is a psalm, not only of law, but of love, not only of statute, but of spiritual strength, not only of devotion to precept, but of loyalty to the way of the Lord. [VanGemenen]

When you need comfort, seek it in God's Word. Here are three circumstances in which we are troubled and three corresponding ways to be comforted by God and His Word —

1. **When Afflicted, Be Comforted by the REMEMBRANCE of God (vv. 49-50)**
2. **When Mocked, Remember the WORD of GOD (vv. 51-54)**
3. **When Discouraged, Remember the GOD of the WORD (vv. 55-56)**

Here are three ways to be comforted by God and His Word —

### 1. When Afflicted, Be Comforted by the REMEMBRANCE of God (vv. 49-50)

- Throughout this psalm, the writer makes affirmations of his commitment to Scripture and God and also makes requests of God. In some stanzas, he makes many requests of God (cf. vv. 33-40). In other stanzas, like this one, he makes few requests of God. Verse 49 contains the only request he makes in this stanza — ***Remember Your word to Your servant.***
  - ✓ When the psalmist says, “God please remember...” he is *not* saying, “God, I think You have forgotten; may I please remind You of something You said?...” It is impossible for the omniscient God to forget anything (though, as with our forgiven sins, He may choose not remember, Jer. 31:34).
  - ✓ In asking God to remember His word, he is asking God to be faithful to His promises. And again, since God *must* be faithful to His promises (2 Tim. 2:11-13), this request is the psalmist’s way of reminding himself of the faithfulness of God. God will fulfill all that He has promised. In asking God to remember His promise, the psalmist is actually reminding himself of God’s faithfulness.
  - ✓ The **word** that the psalmist refers to here is the most generic word for Scripture — it refers to anything that comes from the mouth of God — it is His Law given to Moses, His promises and attributes in the prophets, and every utterance that He has ever given. It is “God’s truth in any form, stated, promised, or commanded.” [Kidner] And God is faithful to all of it.
  - ✓ Do you remember that God remembers His word and promises?
    - God remembered Noah and delivered him and his family (Gen. 8:1)
    - God remembered Abraham delivered Lot from Sodom & Gomorrah (Gen. 19:29)
    - God remembered Rachel and Hannah and gave them children (Gen. 30:22; 1 Sam. 1:19)
    - God remembered Israel in captivity and brought them back from Babylon (Dan. 9)
    - God remembers His promise of salvation (2 Pt. 3:9; 1 Pt. 1:3ff)
    - God is trustworthy for all His people. He has not forgotten His own and He will accomplish all that He has promised (1 Thess. 5:24). Notice what the psalmist says about this word in v. 49 — it is the source of His **hope**. He expands that idea in v. 50 — God is His **comfort**. God consoles him and gives him encouragement. This is the kind of comfort that he receives when he walks through the valley of the shadow of death (23:4; cf. also 86:17).

“The tempted, the anxious, the fearful, the discouraged may all find new hope and good cheer in the knowledge that our Heavenly Father is faithful. He will ever be true to His pledged word. The hard-pressed sons of the covenant may be sure that He will never remove His lovingkindness from them nor suffer His faithfulness to fail.” [Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, 81.]

- The reason the psalmist needs hope and comfort and wants God to be faithful to his promises is given in verse 50 — the psalmist is in **affliction**. This is a somewhat generic word that refers to an oppressive circumstance. He is non-specific about the exact details, but from the rest of the book we know the kinds of things that this man endured [Kirkpatrick, 702]:
  - ✓ He was treated contemptuously for His obedience to Scripture (22, 39, 42)
  - ✓ He was ill-treated (121, 134) for his adherence to the law
  - ✓ The authorities despised and persecuted him (23, 161)
  - ✓ Men of position and power, whom he designates as ‘the proud’ or ‘the wicked,’ mocked him, and sought to oppress and injure him (51, 61, 69, 78, 84, 85, 86, 95, 122, 150, 157)
  - ✓ He was even in danger of his life (87, 109). And these persecutors were not unbelieving foreigners, but faithless Israelites (21, 53, 139). They were selfish, self-satisfied men of the world —incapable of appreciating true religion (70)
  - ✓ He was surrounded by indifference to and apostasy from God (113, 158, 126)
  - ✓ So when the psalmist speaks, he knows about the kinds of problems that we face in life. He has a grasp of reality; and he is resolute that he will look only one direction for help — to God and His Word. We also should note from this that there is no such thing as a problem-free life. You will have trials and difficulties. And they are not necessarily evil or wrong. They are given to us, at least in part, to drive us to God and His Word.
- What will the Scriptures do for the person who is in affliction? The psalmist is clear — ***This is my comfort...Your Word has revived me*** (v. 50). The word **revive** means “bring to life.” But he’s not talking about physical life; and while the Scriptures do produce spiritual life, that’s not really the focus of what he’s saying here either. He means that it has revived his heart — it has given him a renewed courage to endure his difficulties.
- Let me say it this way — the way out (of our problems) is to go deeper in to the Scriptures. You may not have a pathway out of your circumstances. Some illnesses end in death. Some relationships are not restored. Some bankruptcies do finally ruin us financially. So are we to just permanently stay in a state of despair? Hardly. When circumstances grow harder we cling to the Bible more tightly. That is Paul’s point when he speaks about our common temptations (1 Cor. 10:13) — the way of escape is that God gives strength and ability to endure. This is the reviving work of God’s Word.

“It is no small comfort, that God hath written some scriptures to you, which he hath not to others. Read these, and think God is like a friend, who sendeth a letter to a whole house and family, but who speaketh in his letter to some by name, that are dearest to him in the house.” [Samuel Rutherford, *Letters*.]

- When you are afflicted (and you will be), remember and be comforted by God’s promises and faithfulness.
- There is a second remembrance that provides us comfort.

## 2. When Mocked, Remember the WORD of GOD (vv. 51-54)

- It's one thing to endure the "generic" difficulties of life. We know that it rains on both the unrighteous and righteous alike. We live in a fallen world where people get sick and have accidents and have trouble not because of anyone's particular sin, but simply because the world is broken.
- It's another thing to experience trouble and difficulty when people sin against you and they do so with willful, evil intent. That's what the psalmist speaks of in v. 51.
  - ✓ **The arrogant** are those who are proud and pompous. They are presumptuous in their actions. They are freethinkers who are intolerant of those who think differently than them. The "tolerant" say, "You must approve of what I do...you must agree with me and with what I do...you must allow me to have my way...you may not have your way and I do not have to agree with what you do."
  - ✓ These arrogant opponents **utterly deride me**, the psalmist says. They scoff and ridicule the psalmist and the clear implication is that they mock him because he does **not turn aside from Your law**. They mock obedience to God and are critical of those who love God.
- The word that the writer uses for **law** is the familiar word *torah* (also in vv. 53, 55; it is used 223x in the OT). That word can refer to the Mosaic Law, but it can also be used more generically for the commands and directives of God. The word suggests a pointing of the way — so in His Word God directs people to which way — it is a revelation from God about what to do, and it is to be obeyed.
- Notice the psalmist's commitment — **I do not turn aside** — He is exhorted by the mocking of the unbelievers to bend his pathway towards evil, but he will not go that direction.
- The way that he helps himself to stay true to God is given in v. 52 — **I have remembered Your ordinances...** This is the second use of the word "remember." And if we said that the word in relation to God (v. 49) suggested God's faithfulness to His word, then it should have a similar sense here:
  - ✓ To remember God's word is to think about and act on what we know about God's Word.
  - ✓ Specifically, the psalmist says he will act on the **ordinances** of God — these are God's judgments. It refers to God's authority to make decrees and order the obedience of His people.
  - ✓ And these ordinances aren't new. They are **from of old** — that is, they are eternal. They have always existed and are always right and true. What God has said does not change or shift.
  - ✓ And to meditate on those truths is a **comfort** to the psalmist (same word as v. 50). It consoles and encourages the psalmist when he acts on the commands of God (even in the face of opposition).
  - ✓ The psalmist doesn't regret obeying God. And you and I will not regret obeying God, either — if we properly weigh what is at stake in our obedience (cf. Heb. 11:24-26).
- Notice two more responses of the psalmist to the contempt of the unbelievers toward Scripture:
  - ✓ He has **burning indignation** against the **wicked**. These evildoers are the opposite of God's righteousness; they have an anti-social rebellious nature. And the psalmist is righteously angry at their sin. This is a good picture of what righteous anger is — it is indignation for those who treat

God and His Word irreverently and disobediently. Yet the psalmist doesn't stay angry; as Paul would exhort the Ephesians later (4:26), he resolves his anger by trusting God. And his trust of God is denoted by what he does in v. 54 —

- ✓ He sings **songs** of **God's statutes**. When he says he sings songs **in the house of my pilgrimage**, you might think, "he sings in corporate worship after making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem." But that's not what he means — he is talking about singing songs in *his* house — the house that will not be long on earth (because he will not be long on earth — **pilgrimage** means he's on a short journey).
  - His life here and his home is just a temporary dwelling place; he is a resident alien in a foreign land making his way to his eternal home.
  - The believer in God and Christ will be out of step with this world. But this world is not our place of joy; our joy is in Christ and in His Word (Phil. 3:17-21).
- ✓ And on this journey, even when he sees evil, he can sing songs about God's statutes.
  - The word **statutes** is taken from a word that means to engrave or inscribe something. So God's word is engraved in stone (literally, in the case of the Mosaic Law); it is permanent and unchanging and has binding implications for us. God's Word is lasting and eternal.
  - And when the psalmist thinks of that permanent word, he breaks out in song. Even though he had been angry over the rebellion of the wicked (v. 53), God's word is his confidence and joy.
  - Do you recognize how unusual it is that Christians sing? The world doesn't sing. The world listens to others perform songs, but those songs are filled with sorrow, ugliness, and despair. The Christian sings (at home and in worship) songs of joy and hope even while living in a world of sorrow, ugliness and despair. But he can only sing those songs when he fills his mind with the unbending, eternal, permanent **statutes** of God.
- Let's summarize these four verses. The psalmist is under attack for his obedience to God's Word. And when under attack, he remembers the authority, directives, and permanence of God's Word.
  - ✓ It is appropriate to say that when we are under attack (and we *will* be mocked, criticized, and maligned when we obey God), we too should turn to a more resolute obedience of God.
  - ✓ The world in which the psalmist lives is hostile to God. The world in which we live is hostile to God. It's a new situation for us. We aren't used to being the opposition. We do not need to turn and run in fear; our hope and confidence is in the author of this book. When opposed for our faithfulness, we can do nothing better than becoming even more resolute in our obedience.
- There is one final remembrance that brings comfort to the psalmist in his troubles. He has remembered the faithfulness of God (and God's remembrance), he has remembered the Word of God and its ability and power. And now he remembers one more truth —

### 3. When Discouraged, Remember the GOD of the WORD (vv. 55-56)

- Verse 55 refers to a common malady. He refers to a time when he is awake *in the night*. Now some of you work at night and your minds are awake and alert and active, but that's not what the psalmist is talking about here. He's talking about being awake in the middle of the night when one should be asleep. And the temptation when awake at 2:45 a.m. is to fret and worry and be anxious. Our unrest has awakened us, and our lack of trust in God feeds all our worst fears. The psalmist has an antidote.
  - ✓ Some of you will wake up at night and pray or recite Scripture. And that's an appropriate response. But the psalmist says that he does something else.
  - ✓ He **remembers Your name**. That doesn't mean that he doesn't meditate on the Scripture, but that he meditates on and remembers (is faithful to) the God who wrote and declared the Scriptures.
    - Here the psalmist also addresses God directly — **O Lord**. This is the name YHWH — the covenant name of God with Israel. He is the faithful God who is lovingly loyal to His people. He has made a promise to His people and He will keep that promise to keep them.
    - The psalmist uses the Scriptures to remind him of who God is and what God does. And in remembering the name of God (and resting in Him), he **keep(s) Your law**. He protects, guards, and watches over the directives (*torah*) of God.
  - ✓ In fact, he culminates this stanza by saying in v. 56 that, **this has become mine — that I observe Your precepts** (the detailed instructions of the Lord, providing detailed direction for our lives). Because he has spent so much time remembering God, meditating on the authority of His Word and the good God who is behind those words, he is led to greater obedience of that Word.
- These two verses are a reminder to do at least two things —
  - ✓ *Use Scripture to lead you to God*. The Scriptures are not given merely to inform our morals and encourage us in our failures and give direction to our decisions. Scripture is fundamentally given to us to reveal God to us and drive us to Him in love and devotion (which is what Jesus means when he says that the greatest law is to love the Lord your God..., Mk. 12:30; cf. also 1 Tim. 1:5).
  - ✓ *Practice what you see in Scripture regularly*. The psalmist can only say **I observe your precepts** because he has intentionally implemented what he has learned in the Scriptures. No one accidentally becomes holy. Holiness is the result of an intentional plan to obey and follow the Word of God. Cultivate ways to regularly (daily) practice what you are reading and learning in Scripture. Be a hearer *and* a doer (Js. 1:22).

## **CONCLUSION:**

- We are well-taught at GBC. We love the Word of God and we teach it in every setting we can — Sunday worship, Sunday School, AWANA, small groups, counseling, etc... But we do not have enough of the Word of God in us. We have not reached a saturation point of Scripture. We need more of it in us — shaping, guiding, and giving us hope. Our greatest hope and life for this year is to take in more of the Word of God.
- Commit to increasing your intake of Scripture next year. Here are three applicational actions to take in light of this message:
  - ✓ Don't just read the Bible; meditate on it. For every two minutes you spend reading, spend one minute thinking — what does this mean? what must I do in light of what I have read? *What does this reveal about God and what should I do about that revelation?*
  - ✓ Be intentional about your Bible intake. You will only take in the Scriptures when you plan to do it (location, time, and procedure). [We have a variety of Bible reading plans to help you.]
  - ✓ Be intentional about what you do about what you take in. Who can I tell what I have learned today? What is one thing I can do today to change towards Christlikeness?
- You will be afflicted in 2016. Your hope and comfort will be the Scriptures and the God who wrote and is revealed in the Scriptures.

**BENEDICTION:** Joshua 1:8-9