

Costly to the Lord
 Psalm 116:1-19
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When you walk with family members through times of suffering, you can sometimes feel like you are alone. Even as a Christian, there are moments when the long days of walking through suffering with a loved one's lengthy illness is taxing and can weary the soul. Let me just say that is normal, and it is okay.

It is in these moments we can feel all alone. Yet, even when it feels like we are alone because we are tired or *because, in a sense*, we are literally alone. In other words, you are the only one sitting in that hospital room with your loved one. However, if you are a Christian, you are never truly alone. You may feel all alone, but the biblical truth is that you are never truly alone. Bottom line: This is a truth that must be believed by faith.

I say we must believe it by faith because, in these lonely moments, our emotions will betray us. Our unguarded thoughts will confuse us. When our emotional tank is empty, our strength is gone, and we are so weak and worn out with all we have endured, it is in those moments of chaos, we may think we are abandoned or forgotten by the Lord.

It is in those moments we must preach the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ to ourselves. *It is in those moments we must remind ourselves that Jesus suffered and died alone on the cross so that we would never once be alone.*

Brothers and sisters, everything that is written in Scripture is to remind us that when we have faith in God, we never endure suffering and death alone, no matter how extreme it may be.

Let me show you what I mean. The sermon text is Psalm 116:1-19. I will preach from the ESV that is what is in your service guide. However, at my mother's funeral, I read Psalm 116 from my mother's Bible. She liked to use the Living Bible. It is a beautiful paraphrase of Psalm 116, and I want to read it to you:

*I love the Lord because he hears my voice
 and my prayer for mercy.*

*² Because he bends down to listen,
 I will pray as long as I have breath!*

*³ Death wrapped its ropes around me;
 the terrors of the grave overtook me.*

I saw only trouble and sorrow.

*⁴ Then I called on the name of the Lord:
 "Please, Lord, save me!"*

*⁵ How kind the Lord is! How good he is!
 So merciful, this God of ours!*

*⁶ The Lord protects those of childlike faith;
 I was facing death, and he saved me.*

⁷ Let my soul be at rest again,
 for the Lord has been good to me.
⁸ He has saved me from death¹,
 my eyes from tears,
 my feet from stumbling.
⁹ And so I walk in the Lord's presence
 as I live here on earth!
¹⁰ I believed in you, so I said,
 "I am deeply troubled, Lord."
¹¹ In my anxiety I cried out to you,
 "These people are all liars!"
¹² What can I offer the Lord
 for all he has done for me?
¹³ I will lift up the cup of salvation
 and praise the Lord's name for saving me.
¹⁴ I will keep my promises to the Lord
 in the presence of all his people.
¹⁵ The Lord cares deeply when his loved ones die.
¹⁶ O Lord, I am your servant;
 yes, I am your servant, born into your household;
 you have freed me from my chains.
¹⁷ I will offer you a sacrifice of thanksgiving
 and call on the name of the Lord.
¹⁸ I will fulfill my vows to the Lord
 in the presence of all his people—
¹⁹ in the house of the Lord
 in the heart of Jerusalem.
 Praise the Lord! ²

The essence of this Psalm is that the Psalmist is preaching the faithfulness of God to himself while he is enduring suffering and even facing death. Bottom line: *He desperately needed to remind himself of the grace, mercy, and kindness of God.*

We are just like him. When these events come in our lives, we tend to forget God or forget that He is good, especially when it is a lengthy time of suffering that looks like it will end in death. Psalm 116 shows us four steps that we should take when we face suffering and even death:

1. The First Step: Call on Jesus (vv. 1-4).

Look at the first four verses:

¹ The psalmist is not referring to physical death by eternal spiritual death. In other words, he did not abandon the Lord in his suffering. He did not fall away but remained faith to the Lord even in suffering and death.

² Tyndale House Publishers, [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015), Ps 116:1–19.

*I love the LORD because he has heard
my voice and my pleas for mercy.
2 Because he inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.
3 The snares of death encompassed me;
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I suffered distress and anguish.
4 Then I called on the name of the LORD:
“O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!”*

When we are talking about calling on the name of the Lord, we are talking about calling on Jesus. So, the very first step we should take is to call on Jesus in the face of suffering and death. Sadly, it is probably not the first step we take. For some of us, it is the last step we take, if we take it at all.

Friends, we will all face suffering and death. It will be our suffering and death, or it will be the suffering and death of a loved one. We will be in the pangs of suffering and death. Sometimes it will seem like it has washed over us like a flood, and in those moments, we need to cry out for the mercy of the Lord.

Let me encourage you that when those times of chaos, confusion, hurt, and pain come, pump the brakes on the thoughts that are racing in your heart and mind and call on the name of the Lord Jesus to help you.

2. The Second Step: Rest in Jesus (vv. 5-9)

First, look in vv. 5-6:

*Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful.
6 The LORD preserves the simple;
when I was brought low, he saved me.*

Verse 5 is the key to this section of the Psalm: “*Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful.*” The point is: in order to rest in Jesus, we must remind ourselves that although the pangs of suffering and death have encompassed us and although *we feel like we are overwhelmed by chaos and confusion, God always does what is right and is always merciful.*

When we do this, what will eventually happen is the grace and peace of God will come to us like the beginning of a light shower and eventually become a deluge of grace, peace, and rest.

Think about it this way. In the face of suffering and death, we will not understand all that God is doing, and that is okay.

The psalmist says in v. 6 that he is *simple*. The fact is all of us are simple when it comes to understanding the ways of the Lord. God’s ways are not our ways. However, we do not have to understand all that God is doing. All we need to do is rest, and when we rest the *simple with simple childlike faith, will receive peace that passes all understanding.* It is a peace from God that bypasses our emotions and our logic to fill our hearts with confidence in God.

I know over these past three weeks, my sister and I both wondered why our mother was lingering so long in her suffering. I doubt we will ever understand all of God’s plan. I see some of it, but the truth is I am simple when it comes to His ways. So, the best thing for me to do is to rest in the sovereign hand and plan of our gracious and good God.

How do we do this? Look in vv. 7-9. The psalmist teaches us to remind ourselves to rest in our faithful sovereign God. Look at how he talks to himself while he is in the middle of all his turmoil:

⁷ *Return, O my soul, to your rest;
for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.*
⁸ *For you have delivered my soul from death,
my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling;*
⁹ *I will walk before the LORD
in the land of the living.*

What does it mean to rest in Jesus? Resting in Jesus is not inactivity. It is not sitting around watching TV or just staring up into space.

Resting in Jesus is actively reading and preaching God's word to yourself. Perhaps it is listening to God's word read to you on audio. Perhaps it is listening to music that is faithful to Scripture as well. I know for me I filled my heart with Shane and Shane's *Psalms Vol. 2* for three weeks. Even right now, I am immersing myself in this album.

Brothers and sisters, we must fill our hearts and minds with Scripture, songs, hymns, and spiritual songs which are the Balm of Gilead for our restless hearts. This leads us to the next step we need to take in vv. 10-15.

3. The Third Step: Obey Jesus (vv. 10-15)

Look at what the psalmist says in vv. 10-11:

*I believed, even when I spoke: "I am greatly afflicted";
¹¹ I said in my alarm, "All mankind are liars."*

He says he believed God's word even when he was greatly afflicted. This is where the rubber meets the road—right? This is where faith in God overcomes doubt. The psalmist was in circumstances that created doubt in God's goodness, God's righteousness, and God's sovereignty.

Then to make matters worse, there were those who were telling him lies about God. They were telling him that God had abandoned him and God was not good or that God did not exist at all.

Yet, look at what the Psalmist says in v. 11. He says all mankind are *liars*. He is not referring to all people in general. He is referring to those who say the Lord is not good because He allows suffering and death.

You see, there will always be those who do not believe in Jesus and say God is not good because He allows suffering and death. It is these people he calls *liars* because they lie about who God is, His ways, and purposes in suffering and death.

Next, notice what happens in vv. 12-14. Finally, the word of God goes into deep, dry recesses of his heart. The psalmist begins to bear the fruit of obedience. Look at what he says in vv. 12-14:

¹² *What shall I render to the LORD
for all his benefits to me?*
¹³ *I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD,*
¹⁴ *I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.*

Now the psalmist says he is going to obey the Lord. His obedience will be evident to all. It will be apparent to those who *trust* in the Lord and a *witness to those who lied about Him*.

Finally, in v. 15, we have one of the most beautiful verses in the Bible. Look at what he says:

¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.

The psalmist has preached himself into a deep trust in God. He understands that even in the face of suffering and death that God has not abandoned him. God is not absent, *nor* is He distant, *nor* is He uncaring.

He understands that God is not so busy running the world that He does not care about the death of His saints. The psalmist now understands and believes that even the death of one of God's saints is precious to Him.

The word *precious* also means *sacred*. Life was highly valued in the Old Testament, and no one valued the life of His saints more than the *Author of Life*.

For God, the death of His saints is *sacred* and even a *holy* thing. God loves His people, and the death of even one of His saints is costly and tender to Him. This leads us to the last step we should take.

4. The Fourth Step: Give thanks to Jesus (vv. 16-19)

Faith that rests on the rock of God's word leads to thanksgiving. The psalmist understands that physical death is not the end for God's people. God created us to be with him in Heaven for eternity. This kind of faith enables us to look through our light and momentary afflictions into eternity.

Look in v. 16.

*¹⁶ O LORD, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the son of your maidservant.
You have loosed my bonds.*

The psalmist is thankful because he is no longer a slave to the world's lies and a slave to physical death. God has set him free because He belongs to God.

Now he understands that he has been brought into the family of God. As a result, He offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God.

Look in vv. 17-19.

*¹⁷ I will offer you the sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the LORD.
¹⁸ I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people,
¹⁹ in the courts of the house of the LORD,
in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!*

What a beautiful summary of all that he has been preaching to himself.

Notice how he concluded the Psalm. *He began by staring death in the face and concluded by looking into the face of God. Friends, this is good news if you belong to Jesus.*

But let me ask a question. *Why do we struggle to believe and take these biblical steps in the face of suffering and death?*

It is because we often focus on the *immediate* instead of the *eternal*. Listen, it is a difficult experience when suffering and death encompass you. It can be a difficult thing when you are caught up in a tidal wave of pain.

I do not want to minimize the pain we experience. However, if we only focus on the pain and suffering, we will be left without hope. Yet, our tendency is to fix our eyes on suffering and death instead of fixing our eyes on Jesus.

Here is what happens. We begin to question God. We begin to constantly ask—“*God, why are you doing this?*” Or “*Why are you allowing this to happen?*” When we focus on “*Why?*” we are actually fixing our eyes on the immediate, and when we do this, we lose sight of our eternal hope in Jesus.

Here is the challenge for us. Instead of trying to figure out, “*Why is God allowing this to happen, or why did God allow this to happen?*” we need to remember what the psalmist said about himself and us—we are *simple*. We will most likely never understand all or even any of *why God did what He did*.

Here is some good news for you. By faith, we can hold fast to the promise that Jesus will one day wipe away every tear and heal every hurt. He will one day make every bad and sad thing that has happened to us come *untrue*.

We need to learn to live in the immediate suffering and death BUT ALSO be able to look through it and fix our eyes on the eternal promises of God in the person and work of Jesus.

Now the question is: How? How do we see through the pain, suffering, and death of this life and fix our eyes on Jesus? How do we call on Jesus, rest in Jesus, obey Jesus and give thanks to Jesus in the midst of all of this?

First, we must be in God’s word. God’s word is inspired and filled with the Holy Spirit of God. We must be in the Word of God. We should read it, listen to it read, and even sing it in hymns and songs. We need a consistent intake of God’s word.

Second, we should pray and ask others to pray for us. Do not forget the power of the One who hears the prayers of His saints. The best thing we can do in the face of death is talk to the Author of Life.

Finally, we need to remind ourselves of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you remember v. 15? Verse 15 is there to give us gospel-comfort from God’s word.

Look at v. 15 and listen to it again. As a matter of fact, take your finger and put it on this verse; trace it with your finger as I read it.

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.”

The word “*precious*” in the original Hebrew can also be translated “*costly*.” The Lord knows about *costly sacrifice* and loss. It was the costly death of His only Son, the Lord Jesus, that makes the suffering and *death of His saints precious*. It was the *costly* sacrifice, the *costly* suffering and death of the Lord Jesus Christ that removed the sting of death and the curse of death. Jesus’ death and resurrection from the dead reversed the curse of death.

Because of the costly death of Jesus, the death of God’s saints are precious, sacred, and holy to Him. It is because of the costly death of Jesus, we can call on the name of Jesus, rest in Jesus, obey Jesus and give thanks to Jesus in the face of suffering and death.

Bottom line: *It was Jesus’ costly life given on the cross where He suffered and died alone so that we would never once be left alone in the face of suffering and death.*

Friend, if you have never called on the name of the Lord Jesus to save you—call on Him today. Turn from your sin of trusting in yourself and fix your eyes on Jesus. He will save you and never leave you or forsake you as you walk through the suffering and death of this world.