

You can tell the Lord that you love Him

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[0 : 00] I'd like please to turn in your Bibles to Psalm 116. This is the only guaranteed way of making sure I'm saying what God is saying.

And so we're going to turn to Psalm 116 and now hear God's Word. Psalm 116.

I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

The snares of death encompassed me, the pangs of show laid hold on me. I suffered distress and anguish, then I called on the name of the Lord. O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul.

Gracious is the Lord and righteous our God is merciful. The Lord preserves the simple. When I was brought low, he saved me.

[1 : 18] Return, O my soul, to your rest. For the Lord has dealt bountifully with you. For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.

I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living. I believed. Even when I spoke, I am greatly afflicted. I said in my alarm, all mankind are liars.

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

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of one of his saints. Is the death of his saints. O Lord, I am your servant. I am your servant, the son of your maidservant.

You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to you sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.

[2 : 25] In the courts of the house of the Lord. In your midst of Jerusalem. Praise the Lord. Psalm 116 is a wonderfully simple psalm.

But it's one of those psalms that is very specific and we can't get beyond. And hopefully we'll see that as we come back to that in a moment.

We're going to do that now after we sung the Lord is my shepherd. And then we're going to come back to Psalm 116. Psalm 116.

And we're going to tell another person where he is if they don't know it. Now some of you may have experienced this very thing if you've been out walking somewhere. And you've perhaps gone off the beaten track.

Or you're in a new location. Perhaps on a holiday that you've never been before. And you might go up to someone and say, Is this the way to? Or how do I get back to wherever it may be?

[3 : 58] And it's no good asking somebody else who doesn't know. And some of us have run into someone who goes, Well, I'm on holiday as well. You know, I don't know my way back either.

And so we begin to understand immediately how important it is to be directed by someone who knows their way around. Who knows how to get from A to B and back to A once they're at B.

And the Psalms, in many ways, is God's compass. It's able to tell us exactly where we are in our walk with Him. It's also able to point out when we are going off the track.

It's also able to instruct us how to come back into the way that God wants us to walk. Now, most people who end up lost don't immediately go off the beaten track and immediately feel that they're lost.

Okay, it's only after walking some distance and suddenly the surroundings don't look all that familiar that suddenly it dawns on you, actually, I don't know where I am.

[5 : 09] Now, the same is true. The same is exactly true when it comes to your walk with God sometimes. You can be, at least you, because God is wherever you are, you never feel distant from Him in that sense.

But at the same time, clarity over where your life should be going tomorrow or what direction you should be going in as a Christian is less clear. You know that God is with you wherever you are, but you're not all too sure as to where God is going to be taking you further down the road.

Now, what the psalmist does here is, or the psalms in general, they don't hide the fact that life is hard and they don't hide the fact that life contains quite a lot of troubles with it.

In other words, wherever there is life, you're going to have troubles in that life somewhere down the line. But at the same time, the psalms want to make abundantly clear that God is the only source of comfort when you're lost, when you're down, when you're up.

He's the only security wherever you may find yourself wondering what God might actually be doing with you. So the lesson here, at least reflectively, from this man, this psalmist here, is one where he's been through trials, he has come out the other end of those trials, and then he reflects back on them, almost from the vantage point of being restored by God.

[6 : 47] But he also understands that not everything that he wrestles against is necessarily out there in the world, but it could be himself. His greatest battles may not actually be external ones, they could be internal ones.

So life is difficult not because the world is making it difficult for him, but because he makes it difficult for himself, all by himself. And then some of us will know that you can add to that by addressing the fact that we can end up colliding with the will of God, wrestling with God.

And we know that God is always going to have his best intentions for us, but not always our desires. So God's good isn't necessarily our good.

God's will isn't necessarily our will. Now we know that to be true, but we don't know it when it's manifestly true. Meaning that if God is saying to you, this is my will for you, and you think, no, I'm still waiting to find it out.

What you do is you ignore the very things that God has given you, because you think God's, not that God's got it wrong, but I still must, it must be around the next corner. Okay, it must be coming tomorrow.

[8 : 02] And it's not always the case that it's coming tomorrow. God's will could be, well, it is here today. Okay. So this idea of direction being lost and found is something that we know for certain as we look backwards, but not something that we know with all certainty looking forward.

And that is, that's part of the pressure, I guess, of living the life walking with God. Okay. It's not that we're walking with God blindly, but God's will will move us into areas that we perhaps haven't anticipated or leave us in places, even though our desires think that God must be doing something else with us further down the line.

So the summary here is pretty straightforward. The psalmist gives us an expression of his love for God and the reason why he loves God.

Now, I want to point out here that what the psalmist is doing is wonderfully encouraging for us because he knows why he loves God. When he says to God, I love you, he knows that God knows why he loves him, but he also knows why he loves God.

Now, if I say to you, love God and love your neighbor, okay, that sounds like, okay, it's a command, I have to go and do it. But it's altogether a different thing to know why that has to be done.

[9 : 29] This man not only loves God, he knows why he loves God, verse one. He loves God because the Lord has heard his prayer and he's pleased for mercy.

God is the one who has inclined his ear to his prayer, verse two, and this encourages him to pray even more as he reflects on his life, verse three.

He recognized that God is gracious, verses four through to six. He also recognizes that God is the one who can supply his needs, verse seven, his greatest need, of course, being rest.

And he recognizes that the only way to get that is if God gives it to him, verse eight. God gives him the strength to live the way God wants him to live, verse nine.

And he recognizes that God protects him from external troubles, but he is also there to protect him from his internal ones. Not only is God caring for this man in the world, he's caring for this man inwardly.

[10 : 38] He looks after him on the inside because he, verse 11, is tempted to believe the lies that other people tell. And the trouble with believing a lie that somebody else tells, sometimes you just can't get it out of your mind.

And then you might just end up believing that the lies people tell about you are actually true. And you have to be reminded, most importantly by God, that this is what God thinks about you.

Okay? It doesn't matter what anybody else thinks. They're all liars. Okay? What God thinks about you is the most truthful, the most accurate, and the most reassuring.

And that includes some of the lies you might even believe concerning yourself. I'm no good. I'm not worth it. I can't. If you belong to Christ, you cannot be any better than what you are right now in the eyes of God.

You cannot be any more beautiful. You cannot be any more perfect. You cannot be any more righteous. That's in God's eyes because God sees us as complete beings in Christ. Now, we struggle to see that because we see ourselves on a day-to-day basis with all our troubles and strife.

[11 : 49] He considers them. How can he thank God? And he recognizes that thankfulness is the only way he can, verse 12. He doesn't have anything to give to God that he hasn't already been given from God, but he knows that the one thing he can give is thankfulness for how God has treated him, verses 12 through to 18.

But this is not something he wants to keep to himself. He wants to make sure everybody knows just how thankful he is to God. Now, why would he do this?

So that he can boast? No. Rather, so that he can encourage everybody else in the worship service. His thankfulness, in verse 19, is taking place in the congregation of God's people.

His thankfulness to God is taking place in a meeting like this. And he wants everybody to know that God has been good to him so that it will encourage godliness amongst those who are listening to his prayers of thankfulness to God.

Now, if you contrast this with a man in Psalm 73, he's also wise to know that if he's having a down day, he doesn't go around telling other believers because he might just take them with him.

[13 : 06] It's better to keep quiet and draw close to God. So we begin with his opening statement of why it's important for you to tell God you love him.

When was the last time you told God you loved him? When was the last time you told God you loved him? Well, it will be the last time you recognized something that he did for you.

It will be the last time you remembered something that he did for you. And so the moment you begin to recognize, the moment you begin to reflect, the moments you begin to remember, suddenly you turn to God in thankfulness and declaration of love for him.

I love you. And you recognize that you're loving God because he's first loved you, exactly what John says. And that declaration of thankfulness and love for God, you only ever get to that point when you begin remembering what God has done for you.

So if it's been a long time since you've said, Lord, I love you, then it could, perhaps that goes point for point with the fact that it's been a long time since you have remembered what God has done for you.

[14 : 23] If it's been a long time since you've told God that you love him, perhaps it's been a long time since you've reflected exactly on what God has done for you. Now that doesn't mean that you haven't met with him in prayer, but what it does necessarily mean that perhaps your prayers have been more forward going.

Lord, can you do, can I have, can you answer these prayers? Rather than reflective on exactly the grace that God has shown you. The psalmist here loves God because God answers his prayers.

He says, Lord, I know you, you inclined your ear to me. Here I am praying all on my own and you, the God of all, inclined your ear to my prayer and answered it.

You've, you've listened to me. And in listening to me, you've answered my prayer. And so what this psalmist begins to teach is that our love for God is directly proportional to what we know God has done for us.

That our love for God is directly proportional to what we remember what God has done for us.

Meaning this, the more we know about what God has done for us, the more we're able to declare love for him for those things.

[15 : 47] But if we, if we have limited knowledge in what God has done, if we're limited in a reflection of God, if we're limited in a remembrance, then it goes point for point that our love for him, at least declared love for him, is also limited.

Because there's a limit to how much we can thank him for. Because there's a limit to how much we know that he's done for us. And this is what this psalmist is saying. Lord, I, I, I love you and I thank

you.

And the reason I, the reason I can do all of this is because I'm, I'm recognizing that you have answered my prayers. That you have been good to me, that you've strengthened me, you've kept me from harm, you've lifted me out, you've brought me up.

You've answered my prayers, you've inclined your ear, you've given me mercy, you've given me calmness and rest on the inside. You've done all of these things for me. And therefore, what can I give back to you?

Well, he can give nothing. And he knows that he can give nothing other than the most appropriate thing. And the most appropriate thing is thankfulness for, one, being able to recognize that God has done this for him.

[17:00] So, the psalmist would have us perhaps go home and get before God on our own and at least ask the question to ourselves. Why do you love God? Why do you love God?

Not just declare your love now, but ask yourself the question, why you love God? Now, a biblical answer might be, well, I love God because he first loved me.

Okay. But why do you love him? Well, because he first loved me. Okay. How did he love you? What are you actually loving him for?

Because the one thing this psalmist is in very specific, Lord, you answered my prayer. You gave me rest. He doesn't just say, Lord, I love you because you first loved me.

No, no, no. That's true. But he goes down to the details. He knows exactly what God has done for him. And therefore, that forms his praise of God.

[17:58] You listen to the words that we sing in the hymns that we do. They declare, point for point, exactly what God has done for us. And as we sing them back to God, it's right that we give God thanks for the things that we say in the hymns that we sing, because they are all the things that he has accomplished.

And they are true, that God is gracious, that God is kind, that God is Lord, that he is sovereign over all. When we sing these things, we are able to do so because we recognize them to be true.

And so, any act of praise, any act of thankfulness that is not empty is a true act of praise and thankfulness because we know it to be true.

In other words, we've all had perhaps the experience of someone saying, like a little child saying, I'm sorry. And you go, what are you sorry for?

And I go, well, I don't know. But I know that I ought to be saying it right at this point. Okay? We all know that it's possible to come up with the right words at the right time. And that can happen to us when we enter into a worship service like this.

[19:11] We all know the type of words that we need to come up with in order to come before God. But sometimes that could be a dangerous way into an empty form of praise.

Unless we know why we're saying them. As we move through the psalm then, the psalmist reflects back on the fact that in life there are tests.

That the troubling times that you can go through as you live your Christian life is not a test of God's love for you, but rather a test of your faith in Him.

Okay? So, it's not a test of God's love for you, but a test of your faith in Him. Will you desire God's assistance in various trials or will you try and go it alone?

And the psalmist recognizes that in the midst of a trial, the believer's heart is being tested in that very way. Okay? Will I go it alone or will I turn to God?

[20:16] Will I reach out for God's assistance or will I just try and manage on my own? Now, here's the thing with an experiment or with a test is that you don't know the result until the test is taken.

The purpose of the test is to determine what the result will be. Now, from God's point of view, He already knows what the result is going to be. But the reason He tests you is so that you would take the test and so that you would know what the result is.

God wants to test you in your faith to see the things that you turn to in those moments of testing. Do you reach out for God's assistance? What are you committed to?

What are you relying on? What are you trusting in? That the test that you encounter will reveal answers to all of those questions and more. Okay?

The reason we must go through tests, the reason we must go through various trials, is because we don't know the outcome to any of those questions until we've taken the test. And so the test is not to question our faith, but rather to get us to strengthen our faith by recognizing, I'm strong in this area,

but I'm weak in that area.

[21 : 29] It's God's way of pointing out to us exactly where we are in our walk with Him. So the tests are never questioning your salvation, but rather demonstrating to you weaknesses, perhaps, in your walk with the Lord.

So as you're tested in your faith, the test is will you require God? Of course you will require Him, but will you turn to Him? Will you reach out to Him?

Will you go to Him in prayer? Will you reach out to us? Because this man has obviously gone through a test, and the test led him to pray. And this is what he's giving thanks to God for.

We saw this on Wednesday evening, that the purpose of Jesus, the Jesus being tested in the garden, of Jesus being tested by Satan in the temptations, is because what's happening there is that He is tested in every way that we are, which is what Hebrew says, yet without sin.

And what the testing does is it reveals the result, especially in the life of Jesus, that He didn't commit any sin. He didn't succumb to the temptations that He was faced with.

[22 : 38] Well, that's exactly what happens to us when we are tested in our faith. It's to give us a guide, a measurement, as to exactly where we are.

One of the biggest questions then we face is, are we the type of Christian that always seems to stumble at the same point? Okay? It's always that same thing that trips us up.

It's always that same situation, or that same circumstance, or that same troubling belief that gets us in trouble, and we get so far, and yet for some reason God brings us back to the same test, and we just can't get through that one.

And the reason we repeat it so often is because God, that's one of the ways that God matures us. We move up through schools and through life, and, you know, by taking tests, exams, that they gauge where we are.

And in the same way, God testing us does exactly the same thing. But He recognizes that God is the one, verses 8 and 9, He sits the test, that God is the one who's delivered Him.

[23 : 49] His eyes from tears, His feet from stumbling. And because of this, He will walk before the Lord. He recognizes that God is the only one who can secure His well-being.

This is what He's recognizing in this psalm. That I've recognized that however many, we don't know how many times He had to sit those type of trials. Okay?

But He has at least come to the point where the moment those trials come upon Him, He prays. And God answers. And that's the result.

That's the blessing. The next thing that He moves on to then is that only at this point does He have something to sing about. It's only at this point does He have something to say.

So He says in verse 19, I'm going to pay my vows. I'm going to give thanks to God. Back in verse 17, I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord.

[24 : 53] I will pay my vows to the Lord, verse 18, in the presence of all His people, in the courts, verse 19, of the house of the Lord in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord.

In other words, here's a man who's got something to sing about. Here's a man who's got something to say. And the reason he's got something to say is because he can look back on the content of his life with God and weigh up exactly his failings and God's strengthenings.

Weigh up exactly the kind of rest that can only be brought to him by God. He has something to say because he's reflective. He has something to say because he remembers just how good God has been to him.

He has something to say because he understands and he perceives exactly the specific ways that God has loved him. So when was the last time you told God you loved him?

When was the last time you told God you loved him? When was the last time you told God you loved him in this place out loud in front of everyone? When was the last time you didn't just sing about his praise, but you actually declared with your mouth in front of everyone here as an encouragement to godliness for us all, that this is what God has done for me?

[26 : 16] And we're not talking about necessarily personal testimonials. We're simply talking about a true heart of praise in a worship service where we get to sing and we get to pray before each other, but more importantly, before God, before each other.

I love you, Lord. This is what he's saying. And he knows why he loves the Lord. He is specific about just how good God has been to him.

Let's wrap this up with a very straightforward conclusion. And the conclusion and exhortation would be this, that a person who truly appreciates or at least understands that their life is in the hands of God knows automatically, or at least they should, that God has got their best interests at heart. Whatever God is going to do with them may not be what they want to be done with. They may want God to do something else with them, but God has definitely got our best at his heart. Therefore, any test that we are put through is simply to reveal perhaps abnormalities in our faith, or at least exactly where we are in our walk with the Lord.

[27 : 34] And what's often the case is that the moment of testing, the first result is normally the truest. The first thing to get revealed is always the weakest link in the chain.

That's just the way that things work out. We can tell where the weakness is when you stretch a chain by the first link that gives way. And in the same way, when a believer goes through a various trial or testing, the first thing to give way, the first thing to falter, that's normally the first point that needs then addressing.

Whether it's an abnormality in your faith, whether it's a weakness over a certain issue, whatever it may be. And this is God's way of pointing out to us, come to me in prayer about it.

Okay, now I've revealed to you what you now need to pray about. And the only way we get to that is by being put through the test in order for that to be revealed.

Then God equips, or rather gives us our own prayer list as he reveals these things to us. So here's the exhortation.

[28 : 46] The more we love God is only possible, or at least declare of love God, which is directly proportionate to the fact of how much we recognize God loves us.

Now, it's not enough to say, God loves me and therefore I love him. It is enough to say that because that's true, but it's not enough to be specific. How does God love you?

Because here's a man who demonstrates that he recognizes God's love in the fact that he listens to his prayers, that he inclines his ear, that he lifts him up when he is down, and he's able to deal with the external pressures of life and the internal pressures that this man brings upon himself.

He's able to tell the Lord that he loves him because he recognizes exactly what the Lord has done for him. And he's not embarrassed to say this in front of everyone, recognizing that he knows that the Lord treats everyone in the same way, not necessarily in the same way because they don't have the same life, but to the same measure of his grace.

God is good to all people. So let me finish with a reminder. And here's the reminder. When was the last time you told God you love him?

[30 : 04] When was the last time you gave him thankfulness for the specific things that he has done in your life and not just the general things that he's done around about?

Now, there's nothing wrong at all, at all, with giving thanks to God for anything. And that should be all the more encouraged. But the thing that ought to be encouraged here in Psalm 116 is giving thanks to God and declaring your love for him for the specifics.

God is being specific with you and your declaration of love to him should be equally specific. What you find throughout this psalm is an order.

And the order goes like this. The man is clearly tested through the various trials of life. And the test reveals that he does lean on God, that he does call out to God.

And that test not only means that he calls out to God in prayer, but then is the very basis for his thankfulness to God in recognizing that God is the one who inclines his ears to his prayers.

[31 : 13] He gives thanks to God, not only for God bringing him through what he's been through, but the fact that he recognizes that it is God who's done it.

It is God who has done it, which is why we have the opening statement that we do. I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.

Verse two, because he inclined his ear to me. Therefore, I will call on him as long as I live. Amen.