

Season 5, Episode 1: Psalm 119: A Song of the Heart

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Felicity: This podcast is sponsored by 10ofthose.com. 10ofthose.com handpick the best Christian books that point to Jesus and sell them at discounted prices each episode. We love to recommend some books that we've been enjoying recently. And this episode I'd love to tell you about Jen Oshman's book, Cultural Counterfeits. She does a fantastic job of biblically exposing what idols are before then applying that word to our culture and our society, and particularly thinking through the false promises that us as women in this society are pursuing. Grab a copy at 10ofthose.com.

Sarah: Welcome to season five of Two Sisters in a Cup of Tea. My name is Sarah and I live in the UK. This is my sister Felicity and she lives in the States. And today we're going to be jumping into Psalm 119 to have a think about how we even start reading the longest psalm in the Bible. But, Felicity, before we even get there, tell our listeners who we are, what we're doing. Something like that.

Felicity: Thanks, there. Hi, everyone. Great to be back. So excited for this season. And I know we say that every season, but this is good, isn't it? Some 119. Who are we? Well, we are sisters who live in different continents. So, Sarah, being in the UK, I'm in the US, and we in different continents.

Sarah: Are on different continents.

Felicity: Good point. As I said it, I thought, yes. I'm not sure I've got it right.

Sarah: In different countries, on different continents.

Felicity: Yes, thank you, grammatical corrections. Thankfully, the podcast is not about grammar. It is actually us sitting down as two sisters over a cup of tea and getting the Bible open. And we love to do that in our everyday life. And we're talking everyday life in a very real sense, because I can hear the footsteps of my children upstairs and your children are supposedly in bed.

Sarah: Yes, I've trusted them to turn their own lights out. So, yes, believe it.

Felicity: Put the headphones on and all as well. So we love getting into the Bible, we love doing it together and we love to encourage others to do that as well. And we do love a good cup of on my part. Yorkshire gray yorkshire tea. Mixed with el grey tea. That's my chosen cup. What about you, Sarah?

Sarah: I think we like to explore into different tea varieties, don't we? I'm not forgetting the Allimportant biscuit, the English variety of biscuits. I'm looking forward to that because I love having a cup of tea with ghee and I love opening the Bible as we do that the aim is that, yeah, this isn't a long chat, it's just a short. Let's get the Bible open, see what it says and pray it into our lives and into our hearts. That's what we're doing, isn't it, really? So, I'm 119. Why? Why have we chosen that?

Felicity: When we were thinking about whether we were really going to jump into some Armstrong team, I did ask a few people, you know, what their experience of it has been, and most people said, well, not much. It's not one that's taught that regularly in churches, is it? And as we've been digging into it, we have realized it is hard. But why did we decide to go for it? Because the psalms as a whole are words that God has given to us in order to pray back to Him. It's like the heart, the voice of a believer who is eagerly seeking the Lord. And I think in Summer 19, we get that in length, but also in depth. And it's been rich, hasn't it, to be beginning to get going on this?

Sarah: It's been rich, but I think it's fair to say, yes, of course, the first associations are thinking it's long, repetitive and boring. And it's all there, isn't it, as well, like, it is long. It's the same length as the book of Ruth or the book of James or even the book of Philippians. Right. So we're kind of doing a whole book in that sense. But it is actually just one song, which is amazing in itself, and I think that's what kind of intrigued us in it. Like, there's this massive song in the Bible and we don't know it and we want to. I think it's intrigued us, isn't it

it? It's intrigued us that there hasn't been that much on it, so we might be totally crazy doing this.

Felicity: And I think it's one that I'm sure many of our listeners will have little nuggets that they know from it. There are verses that be made into songs into hymns and which are repeated exactly.

Sarah: What is it? You're just a light to my path, a lump to my feet. Oh, whatever that word is. Obviously not as well known in my head as I told you.

Felicity: Yeah, there are, like I said, and we've noticed that we thought we did. Maybe we don't know them as well as we thought we did, but taken out of context, why not put them back into context and see what this whole psalm is saying?

Sarah: Yeah, definitely. I guess we want to kind of preempt our chat by just saying from the start, as we say every season, we are not experts. Here we are two sisters opening up the Bible and longing for it to change our hearts. But particularly in this occasion, where it does feel like it's been quite a big thing to get into a psalm that we don't know very well and we haven't found a lot of teaching on it. We're hugely indebted to the late David Palantin from CCF counseling. Christian counseling. He's written an excellent, long article on that. And also Christopher Ash, he's the other kind of Bible teacher. He's written substantially on it. And we're just so thankful for their wisdom and the steering that they've given us in order to help us open this up. Yes.

Felicity: And that's our aim, isn't it, as we walk through it together and helping people who are listening to get into it. We have done a bit of reading, we've done a bit of prep in the sense that we've kind of decided how we're going to approach it. And we're hoping that as we've done that, our listeners are going to feel more confidence to open up this time for themselves. And I think, as ever, we've benefited hugely from talking to each other about it as well. So I think part of the demystifying of it is going to be just talking with other people about it and realizing that what the psalmist is saying is not actually as confounding as it first appeared.

Sarah: And also, just like I love this, we found this quote from Lisa, didn't we just I'm going to read it out because it's just so helpful for what our stance is here. It says, I know that a person would be guilty of the most shameless boldness if he dared claim that he had understood even one book of the Scriptures in all its parts. In fact, who would even dare to assert that anyone has completely understood one single psalm? Our life is one of beginning and of growth, not one of consummation. And it's just so helpful to have that perspective. We're just beginning here, we're beginning a conversation and we were longing to grow in our understanding and we're going to get things right, we're going to get things wrong and we're just learning along the way and we want you guys to come along that journey with us. Yes.

Felicity: And our big prayer is that not just that we would understand the Word more, but that the word itself would be driven into our hearts and be changing us and shaping us as a result. And especially, I think, as we're in a psalm and going to be praying through the psalm as well, then actually that is the heart aspect of what's going on here. And that's, I think, one of the things to bear in mind as we're getting into this. The psalm is a song of the heart and so the aim is to be moved by it. I think the psalms are in the Bible partially with that intention that as believers, we would be moved in our relationship with God. Our emotions would be a part of how we relate to God. So it's not just about gaining knowledge, but it's actually about this song of the heart. Our heart is supposed to be engaged and I think through reading a psalm, that happens all the more. So it's brilliant in that sense.

Sarah: Yeah, no, I think you're right on that. I think it's really important to keep going back to that. I think the temptation is to think, oh, I don't understand this bit, so I'm just trying to understand it. And whilst that is right and true, I want to understand it, I want to understand it so that I can pray it and so I can live it. It doesn't stop at the understanding part, does it? Yes. And I think what's really struck me and palace and really picks up on this is the fact that the most repeated words in the psalm, while we assume it's all about words and statutes and degrees and commands and teaching to do with God's word, actually they're not the most repeated words in the psalm. The most repeated words are the I's Andy's and MYS and yours. And it's just the holy personal aspect of this psalm. I think it's just been

really helpful to realize, wow, this is just like a heartfelt prayer between this psalmist who we don't know who he is, it doesn't say and we can't really make any judgments on who we think it is or not. But this psalmist is praying heartfelt prayers and struggles, praying through struggles to his garden king and we're seeing that we're flying the wall to his relationship with his Lord and what a privilege to step into that and try and understand why is he praying the way he's praying, I guess.

Felicity: Yeah, and I think that the I and the you then that is so relational, isn't it? So as we're in this then we are understanding more of what it is to have a relationship with God and what does it sound like, what does it look like, what does it feel like to be in relationship with the Lord as the psalmist is? And I think, as you said often we assume that the most repeated word in this psalm is the word and precepts and laws and what actually what's going on with all of this. They are in almost every verse. But rather than thinking that it's just all about the word of God, actually if we just take a step back and think about the word of God and the statutes and the law, what is in that is covenant promise. And so the wallpaper of the psalm, the backdrop to the psalm is the word. But as we then hear these various words for the words, if you see what I mean, the laws and the statutes and the promises, what we have there is actually God having made promises to his people, he has said that I am your God and you will be my people. We see that Genesis twelve with Abraham and God's people trust in God's promise and we this side of the cross that is ultimately fulfilled in Christ. So we are God's people through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. And as we claim that, so we can trust that same covenant promise that has been spoken about here. And I think then if you put that back into the psalm context, every time we read those words, the word, the statute, the law, the precepts, it's a reminder that it's God, first of all, who has made this covenant promise with his people. He has made the move towards us in grace and we respond to that grace and the grace is actually in giving us his word, in giving us the law and these promises. And so as we're seeking with this Armist to live it and love it and delight in it, we're actually seeking to live out the grace that God has given us. Does that make sense?

Sarah: That's quite a hard yeah, no I think that's really helpful and I think hopefully we can start to unpack more of what it looks like to live in light of these covenant promises as to go through. But it is a massive, as you say, it's the wallpaper, it's the backdrop to everything that he prays is his dependence that he has saved according to God's promise, according to God's love, which ultimately is fulfilled in Christ. So he looks forward to Christ to trust that God's promise will be fulfilled one day in the Messiah. We look back at Christ and go, wow, he's fulfilled that covenant promise. And Christopher is a helpful way of just kind of framing reading the psalms as Jesus is the only one who can ultimately praise these psalms completely wholeheartedly. He's like the choir leader in singing the psalms, but because we're in Christ, because we are found in Him, we get to be part of a choir. So we get to be able to sing these songs and pray these songs because we're part of that new covenant because of Him. Does that make sense? Yeah, I feel like I'm going around in circles in what I'm saying there.

Felicity: No I think that's really clear and that's part of the challenge of the psalm, of being in the psalms altogether is that there are various facets to what it is to sing this with the psalmist. So as you've just said, we sing it with Jesus as a part of the choir, so through being in Him we are able to sing it, but also we can sit with the psalmist literally as the human believer and sing it with Him as well and feel the angst and feel the agony. And we're going to see throughout the psalm there's a fair amount of suffering and he's seeking comfort and he's asking when God like, when are you going to sort things out?

Sarah: Well, and even just like the really simple thing like the bookends of the psalms, the first few verses and the end verses, it's just so clear on his own simpleness and his own kind of fallenness. He says, oh, that my wage was steadfast and obeying your decrees, then I wouldn't be put to shame when I can see your commands. That's at the beginning of the psalm and right at the end he says, oh, but I've got astray like a lost sheep. He sees his heart so clearly in this psalm. He knows that he cannot obey as he wants to and as he should and that's the standing point that he needs God's promise, he needs God's covenant love, that's his hope, that's his salvation and that's his starting point, seeing his own heart and seeing his need and isn't that promise?

Felicity: Absolutely isn't that a reassuring thing? When you read this psalm you think, I don't know, this guy sounds like he's really got it nailed, it's a bit disheartening, isn't it?

Sarah: We've had some great listener questions about that and we're going to look forward to answering two people's questions throughout the season, but one particular one, or just like that wholeheartedness and what that looks like. So we'll definitely get into that maybe next week. But, yeah, I think just really even just seeing that, for me, that was really, really helpful just to go, oh, he feels like I do. That's just really, really encouraging because that means I can read this and know that the person who first prayed this has felt that wrestle and has felt that battle and that disappointment in myself that I just can't seem to live up to what I want in what God's Law says.

Felicity: And I think you see that as you go through the psalm. I'd really suggest that you give it a good read before you listen to our next episode. Try and read it a couple of times. It takes about 15 minutes, I think, to read it through. And you hear the psalmist asking God, pleading with God, firing off requests to him all the time. It's like a statement about who he is and his character. And then there's like, so, God, please, according to your mercy, according to who you are, according to your word, which brilliantly, as we sit this side of the cross, we hear Word and we know Jesus to be ultimately that, don't we? According to who you are in Christ, who we know you to be. Please Lord, pour out your grace on me, enable me to have this heart that longs for you. I just think that is just so reassuring and I think as I've been reading the psalm it's encouraged me to come to God more with like honest pleading I think it's interesting, it's quite a good question to ask at this stage there are weird just at the very beginning stages, aren't we? But to what extent has reading and being in this psalm impacted our hearts so far? Any thoughts on that so far?

Sarah: Yeah, I think I've been quite struck with how much it's impacted my heart. And we haven't really got stuck in yet. I think just as I've been reading it and I've chosen to try and memorize the first couple. Of sponsors just to try and embed some of it. And I think just even doing that has been super helpful because I've begun praying the way that he's praying. And that can only be good thing in terms of if the psalms are given to us, god's word given us, so that we can pray them back to God. As I read it more and more, and I'm starting to see my prayers shaped by it, I think that's good.

Felicity: And I think that maybe that is like the diagnostic of the heart is as we hear our prayers. Do we hear our prayers? As we see the way we're praying, maybe that shows us a bit more of where our hearts are. I would agree the same thing. I haven't gone as far as memorizing them. Very, very good effort on doing that. But I've been trying to pray in we've got the Hebrew alphabet, that's kind of been the structure for it. So we've got these five verses which.

Sarah: Let's be honest, means nothing, like it might well have meant something to him, but has it meant anything to you reading the psalm with the Hebrew alphabet?

Felicity: Well, in my extensive Hebrew knowledge, which is none.

Sarah: One of the well known facts about it, isn't it? That it's like an acrostic poem and yet it bears no relation to my understanding of the dance.

Felicity: I'm like it may show our lacking in that maybe we're missing something because.

Sarah: We're definitely missing something. I E, the Hebrew language.

Felicity: So as far as we're going to get without Hebrew and without really understanding aspects, what we can say for sure is that our hearts and our prayer life and I think I am hungry for the word and therefore hungering for God more as a result of spending time in this psalm. And it makes me so excited about the next few weeks of digging in together.

Sarah: And also I'm totally daunted though, like this is hard. But I'm also really excited because I want to open up, I want to get to know this song better and I want to be able to live it. Yeah, we want to be able to live it, we want to be able to try it and we want to be able to share it with others as we do every season. We say get a friend, get a group of women together, whatever it is, like I'm going to be doing this with a Bible study church and I'm really excited for that because it's kind of just again, getting the conversation flowing about Islam. That helps us to pray and it helps us to live out God's grace for that. Great. So why not have a thing now? Is there anyone you can invite to read this psalm with you over 18 weeks? Time is gone swiftly, we need to go. Can you pray for us?

Felicity: Yeah, absolutely. Heavenly Father, we praise you so much for giving us the gift of the psalms. Thank you for Psychiatry 19, thank you for the honesty of the way in which the psalmist speaks to you. And we pray that as we're in this psalm over these next few weeks, would you help us to long for you like he does and to come to you like he does. Please, would you do a deep work in our heart through your word, by your grace? Amen.

Sarah: Amen. Well, a joyous be back. I'm just delighted that we're doing season five together. If you haven't already, sign up to our newsletter. There's a link in our show notes and then we're just going to share a few for the season. Some related things. It's got catch up episodes, it's got questions to dig into every cup of tea. And that's where we plow in our time outside of these recordings, recording the actual episodes. Really. So do sign up for that and we look forward to seeing you as we get stuck in. See the first couple of sponsors next time.

Felicity: Absolutely. See you then.

Sarah: Bye.

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