

Season 5, Episode 3: Pressure & Promise (17-48)

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Sarah: Welcome to two sisters in the cup of tea My name is Sarah and I live in the UK. This is my sister Felicity and she lives in the States. So everyone and today we're really looking forward to getting stuck in for the next four Sanders of Psalm 119 together. So, Felicity, we've got Cups of Tea ready, Bibles are open, and hopefully our listeners have managed to read the Psalm over the last couple of weeks as we got going, but it's just really hard to get into this psalm. I don't know whether you found that when you first started reading this and I just wonder whether you can give us a few pinpointers of how do we start getting into this for ourselves and starting to read it fruitfully.

Felicity: Yes, good question. Because as I'm sure you've all experienced, and I definitely experienced it when Sarah in fact, was the one who suggested that we consider doing some 119 and I thought, I don't even know how to start. And actually, it's not that different in many ways to how we start with any book of the Bible, isn't it? So what I've been doing is essentially reading it repeatedly as much as I can and listening to it. I've been loving listening to it sung as much as listening to it read. I've been reading and as I've been reading it, I've been doing the normal kind of things of looking for repeated words, repeated themes, anything that helps me just kind of get a handle on what this writer, what this psalmist is wanting to convey through what is quite lengthy, isn't it? And I think that one of the challenges is that it's not like linear logic, it's not like this, and then therefore that, but actually he's kind of circular. He comes back to the same things again and again, which is helpful because I think that's what we need to hear. But in terms of actually kind of getting into it, that was quite a helpful thing for me to realize. What about you? Have you got any top tips?

Sarah: Yeah, that's really helpful. As we see that. Remember that it's a song. A song with a heart. It is really helpful to remember just that it's not as linear as we might hope. And sometimes it can be easy to look for structure where there isn't, because there isn't in some songs. It's a creative kind of endeavor, isn't it? I think for me, I've been struck with how useful it's been to like, yes, we say the laws and precepts and stuff. It's repeated a lot, but I've kind of been looking almost overlooking that to start off with and seeing what's in between all that, to see the kind of flow of what's going on and what's happening in each stand zone. I think that's going to help me to kind of see the context in which the psalmist is working into. And I think as I've done that, as you go under the psalm again, the context kind of keeps drawing through and then that helps me to go back and see all his requests about the Word and the way that he's talking about it and delighting in it. It's kind of put into the story of his life. I think that's kind of helped me to get into him more rather than just thinking, oh, this all feels quite similar, I don't know what to do with it.

Felicity: I know something that we've both done, which is not my usual kind of decoration of my Bible, but color coding as we've been going through it. So I've been doing it according to whether he's sort of certain about something or whether he's asking for something or whether he's stating something about God. And that's been a really helpful way of just seeing the encounter between all those things.

Sarah: I'll let you know a secret, though. When I first wear this, I printed it all out on a four so I could just swim around it. And when I first read this, I got the pages mixed up and I didn't even notice. I got to the end of the song and I was like, wow, that was more

confusing than I thought it would be. Turns out I was totally reading it in the wrong order. So actually it does make a difference when you read it in the right order. The highlighting helps that, but yeah, I feel like we've come a long way just by the nature of just like sitting down and to read it well, to read it properly. I think you can come so much the way through doing that and asking the Lord to open our eyes, which is what our Psalmist is going to get into in this bit.

Felicity: Yes. Should we get into it? Shall I read those?

Sarah: Yes, I think we're going to split it. Are we going to do the first two and I'll do the next?

Felicity: Absolutely. Okay, so we're in Psalm 119 and it's verses 17 through to 48. Be good to your servant while I live that I may obey your word. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in Your law. I am a stranger on Earth. Do not hide Your command from me. My soul is consumed with longing for Your laws at all times you rebuke the arrogant who are accursed to those who stray from Your commands. Remove from me scorn and contempt, for I keep your statutes. The ruler sit together and slander me. Your servant will meditate on your decrees. Your statutes are my delight, they are my counselors. I'm laid low in the dust. Preserve my life according to Your word. I gave an account of my ways and you answered me. Teach me your decrees. Cause me to understand the way of Your precepts, that I may meditate on Your wonderful deeds. My soul is weary with sorrow. Strengthen me according to Your word. Keep me from deceitful ways. Be gracious to me and teach me Your law. I have chosen the way of faithfulness, I've set my heart on Your laws, I hold fast to Your statutes, Lord, do not let me be put to shame. I run in the path of Your commands, for you have broadened my understanding.

Sarah: Teach me, Lord, the way of Your decrees, that I may follow it to the end. Give me understanding so that I may keep Your law and obey it with all my heart. Direct me in the path of Your commands, for there I find delight. Turn my heart towards Your statutes and not towards selfish gain. Turn my eyes away from worthless things. Preserve my life according to Your word. Fulfill Your promise to Your servants so that you may be feared. Take away the disgrace I dread, for Your laws are good. How I long for your precepts in your righteousness. Preserve my life. May Your unfailing love come to me, Lord, your salvation according to Your promise. Then I can answer anyone who taunts me, for I trust in Your word. Never take Your word of truth from my mouth, for I have put my hope in Your laws. I will always obey Your laws, forever and ever I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out Your precepts. I will speak of Your statutes before kings and I will not be put to shame, for I delight in Your commands because I love them. I reach out for your commands, which I love, that I may meditate on your decrees.

Felicity: Just rich as ever. And it's worth saying that both of us have been really enjoying these stanzas, aren't they? And talking about getting into the psalm, I think there's something in these stanzas that is a bit more tangible. It feels a bit more accessible, so let's make the most of that. Sarah, you actually had quite a helpful way of of kind getting a handle on it. Are you able to just help us with getting that?

Sarah: Yeah. So I think as you go through the first three stanzas, as you start to kind of unpack what his context is in each one, I think you start to see there's some different pressures on Him. So in the first answer in verse 21, he rebuked the arrogance removed from me scorn and contempt and the rulers sit together and slander me. So he's got the situation where he's being slandered for being a believer. It's the pressure of the world, it's the pressure of having to stand firm in a world that does not fear the Lord. And that is a very real suffering, a very real pressure that he's feeling there. And then it kind of changes tone a little bit. So I guess could have been in music terms, you might it just feels like it goes a bit deeper and a bit more solemn almost, because in verse 25, it's going to be the next time. So we've got I'm laid low in the dust and in verse 28, my soul is weary with sorrow. So this feels like a more I don't see as many details of this one, but it's more general, but a deeper suffering. And so maybe just suffering from general life in situations, yes, it's different kind of suffering to the pressure in the standard above. But then in the next Stunder, I think what's really striking is he goes on to talk about his own heart and the temptation to turn away from the Lord and turn towards selfish gain and worthless things. And I mean, that's all of us, isn't it? And so I think what's been really striking is just picking out that context

and realizing, wow, sin and suffering, those are always the big pressures on our heart. And here he's talking about all three, or the two different types of suffering and then sin. So that's the first three and then the final stands. There seems to be kind of resolute kind of answer to the pressure. And I think he lands on the promises of his covenant God and the salvation that he's promised. And there seems to be a confidence that then comes with looking to the promises. Does that make sense? Yes.

Felicity: So helpful, Sarah. I think that's absolutely right. Very helpful to see the context in which the psalmist is sitting. And from that position, with those pressures, those different pressures that you've talked about, really interesting to then sort of dig in deep and see, well, what does he do with that context? What's his go to? And something that really struck me as I was reading these standards was his dependence on the Lord in the midst of those pressures. So I think you see it really clearly in verse 18, open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law and then you have it again in verse 27 caused me to understand the way of your precepts. And that kind of this that I'm going through. And that's true of life, isn't it? Sinner, suffering, this that I'm going through in the midst of that Lord in Your grace because you are the one who will enable me to see the wonders of Your Word. To see you in your word. I just think that then is really helpful. Yes, that makes perfect sense. When you're under pressure, which life feels quite pressured a lot of the time, doesn't it? Actually, we cry out to the Lord to help us to see more of what he's doing and who he is. Because I think that's one of the things when you read this psalm, you think, how could I ever be like this guy? He's got this, like, seemingly abundant delights in the Lord.

Sarah: Yeah. He's asking the Lord to give him that, isn't it? It's very clear requests. And I think I love the way that in the midst of these pressures, Ashley, he doesn't turn to complain, to see in the midst of these pressures, he turns to the Lord and he says, Lord, help me to see. Help me to see what's in Your Word. And I guess it's helping me to have perspective, to look at these pressures from the stance of God's promises and God's Word, rather than being caught up in the whirlwind of yeah, I think that's it.

Felicity: That kind of helped me to see you, God, like what you're doing and your character and who I am in you. And then, okay, what do we do?

Sarah: Yeah. And as he does that, I think in that final stance from verse 41, as we see a bigger kind of focus on the salvation that he's longing for, looking towards, essentially anticipating the cross in that as me, but as he does that and he puts his hope there, that brings freedom. He says in verse 45, I will walk about Him freedom. And then it seems he can have gained confidence because he says that I'll speak of your statutes before kings, and I'll not be put to shame because I delight in your commands. But I think there's been a process and a journey to get there, hasn't it? Yes.

Felicity: I think that's so helpful to see. Then the shift that shift comes through God. I think God answering his prayers because then you see in verse 32, I run in the path of your commands, which is kind of got an energy and an enthusiasm to it, isn't it? For you have broadened my understanding, like, these prayers have been answered. I see you more clearly. I see what you're doing. And as a result, I'm going to, as you say, walk about in freedom. And that resolve how wonderful that that resolve is not of his own making. We're not supposed to sort of muster it up somehow, but God has given Him delight in His Word, delight in Himself, in God Himself, so that he might then be able to kind of do all these things.

Sarah: And it's such an emphasis on the Lord doing the work. So just in the third stanza, reading for example, verse 38 yes, fulfill your promise to your servant so that you may be feared. And then in verse 40 in your righteousness preserve my life. So it's all of the Lord that, isn't it's God's righteousness, it's God's right ways that enable Him to be right with Him and to be able to depend on this promise. And therefore in that he's able to turn from sin and go, no, I'm going to choose to obey even though my heart is longing for that worthless thing over there, whatever it may be. And we all have that the whole time, don't we? But in that moment he's choosing to turn away from that and turn to the Lord because he knows that the Lord is faithful and that ultimately, as he do that, that will bring freedom.

Felicity: Yes. And his all inness for the Lord is pretty impressive, isn't it? But then you think, well, yes, actually from our position this side of the cross and we see Jesus and we see his

life, his death, his resurrection, and we know that these promises that the psalmist is talking about are fulfilled ultimately in Jesus. And so how much more are we able to be all in? That's kind of one of the things, isn't it? As we've been reading through how do we see Jesus, how are we wowed by Jesus as we're in this psalm? And I think that's one of the things that we notice from our position now, we see Jesus to be the fulfillment of these promises that he is depending on and in that, we are standing on the firm ground of the cross.

Sarah: Yeah, but even just seeing Jesus and living these out. So we're talking last couple of episodes about the fact that Jesus is the one who can pray this psalm fully. And just a wow moment for that in itself, isn't it? That Jesus can actually he could pray this integrity and sincerity, but to pray this in the midst of the pressure that he was feeling when he walked this earth, I mean, that's extraordinary. The scorn, the contempt, the slander that he faced and yet he stood firm on the word of the Lord. You think of that kind of instance with the devil where he used the word as a kind of weapon against the devil's themes to tempt him away. Well then the pressure of the suffering, pressure at the cross itself, the pressure to deny the Lord's will and to kind of go the way of selfish gain, I guess, and not going to the cross, his soul being weary of sorrow and yet he was strengthened by the word of God as he did that. And then the fact that he was the one able to even though he was not without temptation, he was the one who walked the earth with so many temptations that everyone has and yet he was without sin at every point he was able to turn from sin in this way that we're reading. I just think that's extraordinary, isn't it, to see Jesus fleshed out and to see the song of his heart hear lived out in that way.

Felicity: And I think it operates on two of those levels. So we have exactly that. But you're saying totally amazing to see Jesus living out. We have that kind of fulfillment of the promises and then actually we have this as we seek the Lord through His Word, as we see all throughout the psalm, as we do that God enables us actually to be more like Jesus, because who we're reading off here is Jesus. Like, isn't it the ultimate fulfillment is this Jesus likes me. And I look at Jesus and I think, yes, I want to be like Jesus. Oh, actually, well, this this is the means. Lord, open my eyes to Your Word, give me delight in Your Word. Let Your Word be the counselors that give me delight. And as I run in the path of his commands, so I am actually by God's grace, being more like Jesus. And isn't that just heartwarming delight, like literal delight?

Sarah: Isn't it that God would use His Word, his living Word in this way to actually change our hearts? And I think we've both been feeling that, haven't we? I guess just as we can round up, just thinking how is this really been driving to our hearts this week? I think I've just been really struck as I've been praying through I've been just choosing a stanza each day to pray through, pray through the words and make them my own. I'm seeing the freedom that comes from that. I'm seeing the delight that comes from doing that, from praying these words that we've been given by God, back to God. And therefore I'm beginning to see and feel more of the blessed life that is talked about as the ideal. And of course, I'm not living the ideal. Of course my everyday reality is all the rest of Waves will be steadfast, as we saw in that first stanza, but just the reality of as we kind of drink and kind of breathe this in almost what's coming out in my prayers and my desires is more of this.

Felicity: Yeah, and it's kind of self fueling, isn't it? Because you do that and then you kind of want to do it more. Because I feel like it breeds its own hunger as we're in this, I feel my hunger for the Word, my hunger for the Lord, my hunger to run in his commands is kind of growing and growing because that's kind of how his grace is working and it's.

Sarah: Not kind of in abstract, I think. I just love that this is so rooted in the context that he's in a context of pressure, a context of sin, a context of suffering, and we are all in that place. And actually this isn't like a kind of ideal reality away from life. This is in the muck of life. This is in the thick of things, isn't it? As he's in the thick of things, he's choosing to praise and choosing to look to the Lord. And there's fruit in that. We see the fruit of it.

Felicity: Yeah. Wow. Shall I pray that we would do that? Yes, please. Heavenly Father, we praise you so much for the gift of Your words or the gift of yourself through your word. And we pray that as we're in the psalm would you open our eyes that we may see more wonderful things in your lore. We pray that you would delight our hearts in you all the more as we dig into these words of yours. Amen.

Sarah: Amen. So quick already. Time is already gone. We have questions in our show notes that help you to keep unpacking what we've been talking about. So do go and find those and they are just a really helpful kind of prompt for you to be talking about these things with someone else as well as if you're doing it by yourself. But on that note, why not share this podcast with a friend? Is there someone you could text right now and just say have a listen and then maybe you could talk about it together? We'd love you for you to be sharing this with others as well, but time has gone. We need to ahead. And so we look forward to seeing you next time.

Felicity: See you soon. Bye. Bye.

Sarah: Bye.

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