

My Soul Clings to the Dust

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[0 : 00] Please turn to Psalm 119. Psalm 119. Psalm 119.

Psalm 119. Psalm 119. Psalm 119. Psalms you'll find in the right in the very middle of your Bible. If you aren't sure, it's right there in the middle. Psalm 119 probably would be right here in the middle. But if you're not at 119, then it goes in order. Right after 118.

Psalm 119. We began this study a month ago, a few weeks ago, to look at living by God's Word. How do we live by God's Word? And what is the value of God's Word? How does God's Word lead us? How is it a light to our path? How is it power to us?

[0 : 59] How is it knowledge to us? And the section we come to today and the next time are very intimate and personal verses.

They are... If it's David who's writing this, then it is a very personal dialogue that David has with the Lord. And this one is more intimate and personal because it gets into some deeper pain.

What does that have to do with Christmas? Well, this isn't Christmas yet. We believe God's Word relates to every day or whatever time of year we're at.

And actually, I think it might be timely because I think a lot of people around the Christmas season don't always feel that joy. maybe are being reminded or stirred up with pain from past things.

Someone was just mentioning to me before service that it feels off this year and that other people have felt that same thing. So maybe this is timely.

[2 : 30] Well, not maybe. The Lord planned it, so it is. So we want to first read it and then pray for God to open our minds, open our eyes, and then we'll dig into it.

So if you're able, please stand as I read from Psalm 119, verse 25 through 32. My soul cleaves to the dust.

Revive me according to thy word. I have told of my ways, and thou dost answer me.

Teach me thy statutes. Make me understand the way of thy precepts, so I will meditate on thy wonders.

My soul weeps because of grief. Strengthen me according to your word. Remove the false way from me and graciously grant me thy law.

[3 : 39] I have chosen the faithful way. I have placed thine ordinances before me. I cleave to thy testimonies. O Lord, do not put me to shame.

I will run the way of thy commandments when thou wilt enlarge my heart. So it reads. Let us, let your Father, grant us insight and understanding into the words of the psalmist.

I pray for those here who have soul trouble today, whose souls, whose deep affections are either dealing with dryness or depression or discouragement.

May we see today, Lord, that the word helps us through that, that you address that, and you give us a path even when we are deeply discouraged and despairing.

You give us a path of light. Meet us today, Father, today. We ask in Christ's name. Amen.

[4 : 54] Please be seated. Depression. What is it with depressed people anyway?

I mean, what's their problem? It's my beard.

I'm growing out the beard. I want to get one of those. No. So what's the problem with depressed people?

Why don't they just snap out of it? What's so hard? We all get low at times. You just have to push through. And make the best of it.

And it'll get better. Right? Well, that was my attitude toward depression before I experienced depression. I had no clue. I didn't get it.

[5 : 51] I couldn't get it. Until you personally experience it, you can't grasp that it's not something you just snap out of. It's one of the most difficult trials I've ever dealt with as a Christian.

And when you're a Christian with depression, then it seems even worse. Right? I mean, Christians are supposed to be full of joy.

Praise the Lord. And when you're a Christian who cannot feel the joy, well, it makes you even more depressed. So how does a believer in Jesus deal with this condition?

Has God addressed this? Has God talked about it? Yes. In fact, I've discovered a lot of places in the scriptures deal with this subject.

My experience of depression was totally new to me. At first, I thought it was just a season of dryness, of funk, is what I had called it back in the day, which I had regularly endured each year for several years.

[7 : 08] I had learned you just have to persevere, push through, and things would eventually improve. Just a season. And it usually only lasted maybe a month or two.

But in my 13th year as a pastor, my first in a new church in the Midwest, I was undergoing a new level of dryness and discouragement. And this funk never improved.

Month after month, instead of snapping out of it, it only deepened. I was struggling in this new church with certain leaders and expectations I had never encountered before.

I was committed to being faithful to God's calling and doing my best to pastor. But almost every encounter became a battle.

I became more and more discouraged and disillusioned with my ministry there. There were key people I had discovered that I could not trust who had lied to me, had deceived me.

[8 : 18] And they were leaders of the church. And so I began to feel more alone. I was constantly fatigued and found the work of ministry had now become hard labor instead of a delight.

Previously, I loved the ministry. I looked forward each week to studying the scriptures and discovering truth and insight. I delighted to passionately preach and teach God's people and lead them in discovering what God had revealed.

It was joy. And all of this changed in my 13th year. I eventually realized that what I was struggling with was depression.

I'd never experienced it before. All the normal things I did in prayer and Bible reading didn't help. I didn't know how to pray about this.

I didn't have the words that expressed to God how I felt. I understood I was in a spiritual battle. And to fight, I needed to intensify my time in prayer and the word.

[9 : 29] So I began searching the scriptures for help. And this eventually led me, God led me, to Psalm 119, verses 25 to 40.

Here I found words of scripture that articulated my feelings and longings for God to revive me.

During the first years of my depression, I would get away from the office, take a walk or hike in a solitary place, and pray these words to the Lord at least once a week.

They became a lifeline of hope for me in these times. I actually began to look forward to these times alone with God. They became an oasis of refreshment in the desert.

It was how I survived four and a half years of a very difficult ministry. I still pray these words on a regular basis as they have become the ongoing expression of my soul.

After 12 years of a depression, I came here. y'all hired me as a pastor, a depressed pastor, and you loved me through it, and you gave me grace, and God lifted me out of it for a while.

[11 : 03] After 12 years, God lifted me out of it. He's recently dumped me back in it, and it's a whole different animal. One of the reasons, selfishly, one of the reasons I chose Psalm 119 to go to because I wanted to re-look at these verses, these prayers, which are a remedy or at least a lifeline in dealing with it and praying through it.

I want you to notice in these verses now, look at Psalm 119, verse 25. I want you to note the issue is the crisis of the soul. There are two confessions that the psalmist makes in these eight verses.

Verse 25, my soul cleaves to the dust. My soul clings to the dust. What's that sound like? There's a picture, isn't it? What is that?

Dust, dry, empty, lifeless. We recall Genesis 2. God created man out of what? Dust.

He became a living soul. dust, is there a connection here? I think so. Depression is like going back to that very beginning before God gave life.

[12 : 39] And so no wonder the psalmist prays, revive me, give me life again. Because what I'm experiencing is deadness. The passion has drained.

Affections are dried up. Lost joy. Lost peace. desperate for refreshment. My soul clings to the dust.

Revive me. Then a second confession he makes in verse 28. Again about his soul. My soul weeps because of grief. Or it could be translated, my soul melts from grief. It's the idea of the soul dripping. So weeps like tears or melts like just kind of the soul's giving way. In sorrow. From sorrow. So he's describing a soul that is disturbed and fading. Dripping from sorrow.

[13:40] Sorrow meaning the word, Hebrew word there is heaviness. That gives it kind of a different picture, doesn't it? My soul melts from heaviness. Remember the first time when I was in the midst of depression, I caught myself that I was doing this sighing thing a lot.

It's like, just like through the day I'd be like, you ever done that? Relate to that? But it was a soul heaviness.

It's an overwhelming burden, a heaviness that weighs on you, right? Pulls you down, loads you down. Now grief, sorrow can do that, but I think the word heaviness is, it's broader than just so the crisis of the soul, these two confessions.

Notice, he makes that confession in verse 25, which leads him to three prayers. Revive me, verse 25, verse 26, teach me, and then verse 27, make me understand.

And then again in verse 28, a second confession, my soul weeps because of grief. Again, three prayers, strengthen me according to thy word, remove the false way from me, and graciously grant me thy law.

[14:56] So we've got a confession and then a triple prayer kind of following it. So in other words, not just one prayer helps to remedy this.

So let's look at the remedy for this. What does God tell us about this crisis of the soul? What can we do when our soul is dry?

when it's heavy? In Psalm 42, David does write that one and he says, my soul is downcast, depressed, disturbed, in trouble.

Jesus described his own soul as troubled, remember? He experienced this kind of pain, inner pain. So it's not sinful to experience this, by the way.

It's just another form of suffering. It can become sinful if you, you know, how you handle it. So how do we handle it? Well, I think we pour out our soul.

[16:12] So the, just look at it in these two confessions. The first confession, right, verse 25, my soul clings to the dust, revive me, revive me.

According to thy word. So revival is the first prayer. Revive me. Your translation might have give me life. but it's, it's, you know, give me life.

Give me new life. Revive. Pouring out the soul for renewal. Bring back life. Restore to me joy and passions.

One of, one of the prayers I, I, I take, some of these prayers I, I pray regularly at this point. As well as, in Psalm 51, David has several things he says.

He talks about created me a clean heart. Renew in me a right spirit. Sustain me with a willing spirit. Restore to me the joy of thy salvation.

[17:17] So I, I like to pray that one because that's a biblical prayer. And I think that's kind of along the same lines here. Restore my joy and passion. He says, revive me how?

According to thy word. What's, what does that mean? What does the word have to do with revival? Right?

Promise. I think that's one way. Revive me according to the, to your word. In other words, your word of what you promised. That makes sense. Revive me with your word.

Revive me through your word. That makes sense too. Right? And I think as he goes further, he goes into talk, teach me, teach me.

Right? So teach me the word. So that, that can help revive me back. According to thy word. And then, and then he prays, teach me. Verse 26.

[18:17] Notice what he says. I have told of my ways. So there's that pouring out of the soul. I'm talking to the Lord about this. I love that phrase, pouring out the soul.

You know, just, just open it. By the way, when we talk about soul, we're talking about the, the deep affections, right? We're talking about, that's where you experience depression. That's where you experience your lowest lows and your highest highs.

You know, your soul is your, your, your deep affections. And that can be a joy. And it can also be this, this great disturbance. And both David and Jesus talked about their soul that way.

Um, so when we talk about heart, that's something different. That's thoughts and intentions. Um, though our culture, we talk about our heart as our, as our feelings, but biblically heart is thoughts and intentions.

The soul is the, the feeling part, the deep feeling part. So according to your word, then he says, teach, teach me.

[19 : 22] Um, I have told of my ways. I poured out my soul. I've told of my ways and thou hast answered me. Um, and, and actually in the Hebrew, it's not hast answered me in the past.

It's, I have told of my ways and, and you are answering me or you will answer me. So there's faith there. As I talk to the Lord, he will give me answers.

As I talk to the Lord, he, he is giving me answers. And I think the follow-up prayers are like that. Teach me, give me understanding. Um, teach me thy statutes.

And then verse 27, a third prayer, make me understand the way of thy precepts so I will meditate on thy wonders. So he prays for revival. He prays that God would teach him.

So it's not just that I need reviving, but I need to better know the ways of God. Um, one of the things that I, so when I first started praying these through, in my depression, um, I focused on the work, the prayers of revival, right?

[20 : 32] Restore to me the joy, uh, revive me, uh, cause that's what I needed most. That's the need I felt. Revive. Give me new life.

Um, but the psalmist is wiser than that. He realizes that I don't just need revival. I need a better understanding of God. I need him to teach me too.

I need to better know the ways of God. I need practical help. So walking with God is not just that I cry out in my crisis. Walking with God is a daily personal relationship where I am trusting him and walking with him and talking to him and leaning on him and, and, uh, uh, abiding in him.

And then he adds to that verse 27, make me understand. Notice that make me understand.

Not just give me understanding, but make me understand. Cause me to understand. I like that. I put it on God to cause the understanding to come.

[21 : 44] Make me to understand. So I, I don't just need to know his ways. I need to understand his ways.

So that I can meditate, so that I can think, so that I can think through, right? Remember what meditation is. It's, it's that not emptying the mind, but filling the mind, thinking through the word of God, right?

Applying it to my life. It's looking at the implications of the word. So why, why is that important? Why is it important that we talk, that we ask God to teach us and give us understanding and not just revival?

Well, cause be one of the things I've learned is that I need to understand. I need understanding because depression messes with my understanding of God.

If I just listen to my soul, instead of just, instead of talk to my soul, you know the difference? I listen to, you know, when you get up in the morning, somebody's talking.

[22 : 46] I mean, you're listening, you're hearing, right? Where's that coming from? That's coming from, you know, you know, that's probably my soul, right?

I don't want to get up or whatever, or, or not another day. So David talks to his soul, right? He talks, oh, my soul, why are you disturbed?

Why are you, you know, my, oh, my soul, hope in God, you know, he's talking to his soul instead of listening. Depressant messes with our understanding of God.

Because we become disillusioned in depression. We become discouraged. We're not just feelings, but thinking. I start to wonder, well, God doesn't answer my prayer.

Why does he let this keep going? I mean, 12 years, how come? I'm so glad we had some of the older saints that wrote about their depression. Like Spurgeon.

[23 : 53] I mean, my depression doesn't even touch what he dealt with. And yet he faithfully kept preaching. He had to take about three months of each year off, because he got into such, what he called fainting fits.

But he battled through it. Depression messes with your understanding.

You get disillusioned. So my experience in Illinois, in the Midwest, in that church, I mean, I had never experienced elders that lied to me. me before. I'd never experienced elders that openly confessed that they had deceived me.

Who are these people? And how can they be leading the church? And, don't need to go into that. Don't need to read, get myself all upset again. So you get disillusioned. It's like, aren't Christians supposed to be honest?

[25 : 03] Especially, supposedly mature Christians? So it messes with you.

Right? You have what you experience in life, and then you have what God says. But if we read God, what God says in context, we see that all of God's servants dealt with hard stuff.

dealt with religious people who lied, dealt with religious people who were, were not honest, who were deceptive, who, you know, I mean, this is, this has always been like this.

We wouldn't probably have this book, and especially the New Testament, if it wasn't for a church that was full of sinful people. Right? So, I'm not here to pick on the church.

It's just, that's one of the disillusioning things. And that's why we see people jumping, hopping churches, right? Because they, they discover people that, ooh, they don't like them.

[26 : 06] They're kind of mean. Right? So I'm going to go over here where everybody else is nice until I find the mean ones. I'm so grateful. I've discovered if you stay long enough, those guys leave, and then, then you start building, building a church.

And that happened. And, and then God plays with it because he starts picking some of those folks and moving them. Not those folks, but, you know, the folks you like.

Oh, people that stay. And confront me and deal, you know, we actually deal with each other. Right? I, I found so much encouragement in this church.

Because there's some real Christians here who, who stay and deal with it instead of run. So, what is, what is God's word that revives life?

So, revive me according to your word. So, what revives me? Even in a dry desert. Well, here, here's some words I'm sure you've heard. Deuteronomy 8. Getting ready to go back in the promised land, God says, you shall remember the whole way the Lord your God has led you these 40 years in the wilderness.

[27 : 25] How did he lead you 40 years in the wilderness? That he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and he let you hunger.

Huh. Isn't God, is that a good God let you hunger? Yeah, he let you hunger. And he fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know.

Why did he do that? That he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone. But, man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

That's what we live by. We fool ourselves into thinking we live by the temporary stuff. We fool ourselves and that's what our soul wants. Our soul wants the quick relief, right?

Our soul wants to be fed now. Our soul wants relief. I want revival now. And God is much wiser than us and wants us to learn much more than that.

[28 : 28] And so he puts us in desert situations where we have to learn to go hungry and go thirsty and be in a dry place that he might humble us and he might test us and that he might cause us to know that we don't live by bread alone.

But true life comes from the word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these 40 years.

Know then that in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you and he disciplines you because he loves you. He's a father.

So God humbles us in desert places so that we can learn that true life comes from God and true life comes from God and we live by those words that come from him.

It's where we find God's sustained life in dry times and joyless times and empty times and drained times from the mouth of God.

[29 : 42] So that's the first confession he makes. The second confession he makes is in verse 28. My soul melts from sorrow, from heaviness. Strengthen me according to thy word. So both prayers are about how the word affects us.

Right? Revive me according to thy word. Strengthen me according to thy word. So again three prayers. Prayer for strength. Verse 28. I'm overwhelmed by heaviness of soul and so we cry out strengthen me raise me up stand me up.

So how does that strength come? Right? According to the word. When does it come? According to thy word. Well so when my soul is heavy when I experience heaviness it weighs me down.

I need strength. So what is that like? How does God express that through his word? Well remember Isaiah 40.

Isaiah said why do you say O Jacob and speak O Israel my way is hidden from the Lord and my right is disregarded by my God. You ever get like that?

[30 : 55] My way is hidden from the Lord. God doesn't I mean I've been praying for months and he's not listening right? He doesn't regard me right?

I mean that's what we tell ourselves because what he's not giving me what I want right now. So how does God respond to when we grumble like that?

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary. His understanding is unsearchable.

He gives power to the faint and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary and young men shall fall exhausted.

But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. Yes. They shall mount up with wings like eagles.

[32 : 02] They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint. Okay. So God gives power to the faint and he increases strength to the weak.

But what did he say? Who does he give it to? Those who what? Nope. Not those who seek him. I mean, yes.

But that's not what Isaiah said. What did Isaiah say? Those who wait. Okay. Hang on. What do you mean wait?

He works. Huh? He works. Patient. Patient. Oh. No. Those who wait. I don't like that word. Who wants to wait when you need help now?

And I want a quick fix. Well, I don't even want a quick fix if it's been months and or if it's been years. We're not talking about a quick fix. We're just talking about some kind of help.

[33 : 08] Some life. And yet the Lord wants us to wait. Those who wait for the Lord. So we as a church have been praying for God's direction, right?

How long have we been doing that? I know we're waiting. That's kind of been the point, right? We're waiting because we don't want to go off and do something and hope he blesses it.

We're waiting for his direction. We want to be clear. We want to make sure we're in his will. I mean, the things we're doing, the things we're supposed to be doing, but we're looking, what is there something else?

Lord, you know what's next for us? And we find that we're still waiting. He's given us some answers that we've asked about.

So we've crossed some things off. But we're still waiting for clarity. Wait, what is wait? Waiting means an F word.

[34 : 19] Ooh, shouldn't have said that. Faith. Sorry. That wasn't preplanned. That was, I would have edited that. Dan's like, sorry, Dan.

Faith. Waiting means faith. I have to trust God's timing. I have to have faith that he's good, that he's wise, that he's faithful.

And have you not heard, the Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. I mean, what is there that God cannot do? So he prays for strength and then he prays for integrity. Look at verse 29. Remove the false way from me. That's about integrity. Remove from me the false way. Remove from me what is deceptive.

I don't just need strengthening when my soul is heavy. I need protection. Because my soul is vulnerable. My soul is weak. My soul will easily look for the false way, for quick relief.

[35 : 35] And so he prays, remove from me the false way, the deceptive way, you know, the broad road. And then he prays for grace, second part of verse 29.

Remove from me the false way and graciously grant me thy law. That's an interesting phrase. graciously grant me thy law. What do you think he's getting at there? Give me thy law graciously. How does the law tend to fall on us? Harsh. Hard. You know, it kills us, right? It exposes us. It reveals. So he's praying, so I want your law, Lord.

I love your law. Bring it graciously. Isn't that interesting? So we can enjoy his blessing. Cause your law to be gracious to me.

Bring law in grace. In other words, so that I do get your conviction, but I don't get the guilt. Right? You know the difference? Conviction comes from the Holy Spirit.

[36 : 44] Guilt comes from the devil. Right? So guilt leads us away from God. Conviction leads us to the Lord. I mean, conviction's about truth, but it's in a way that God draws us.

Come up. Come to me. All who are weary and heavy laden, come up. I'm here. I'm ready. I'm waiting. So note, by pouring out our soul in prayer, we're now enabled to a humble resolve.

Where does he go in verse 30 and 32? Now he can say, I have chosen the faithful way. I have placed your ordinances before me. I cleave to thy testimony.

Oh Lord, do not put me to shame. I still don't trust myself. Right? I cleave to thy testimonies, but I don't trust myself. Don't put me to shame. Keep me from the shame, Lord, that I would lead myself to.

I shall run the way of thy commandments when you will enlarge my heart. Here's the thing.

[37 : 58] If you're depressed, if you're experiencing depression, one of the side effects of that is you have no resolve. I mean, depression is kind of that thing.

It's the cycles and you get deeper. Right? You get into that hole and you've got nothing to get out of the hole. So it takes small steps.

That's what I've found. It takes small steps. Step one, confess. Confess. And that's not really hard. You're not asking for anything yet. You're just saying, okay, Lord, here's how it is. My soul clings to the dust. I'm just telling the Lord exactly what it is.

My soul has melted from heaviness. I just poured out. You think you could do that in depression?

[39 : 07] I mean, it doesn't have to be anything fancy or eloquent or just, Lord, here's it. I just feel really down. And then, right, the second step is crying out the Lord, pouring out your soul.

And maybe all that you can do at first is just pouring it out. But when you can make that confession, it enables you to make the next step.

What's the word that John gives us in 1 John 1 about confession? If we confess, what? What?

You remember that one? Kelly's God, but she doesn't want to speak up. If we confess, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us.

So do you notice what happens when you confess? When you confess, you just openly pour out your soul about what's wrong. He is faithful and he is just to forgive but also to cleanse.

[40 : 34] And when he cleanses you, that enables you to make the next little step. and then ask for some help. Because the first step isn't asking for help.

The first step is just poof. because I'll tell you sometimes that if the first step was asking, I wouldn't do it.

Not always, but in depression, I don't think I'd do it. But because the first step is just pouring out my soul, just saying what it is, I can make that little step.

when I do that, I get cleansed and I am unable to make the next step. Does that sound simple? So, okay, how is it with your soul?

Is your soul uplifted in joy? Because I hope I don't have a building full of depressed. I would imagine many here are uplifted in joy.

[41 : 44] They're experiencing joy and peace. Great, sing. Sing, sing, sing, praise Him. Is your soul clinging to dust?

Cry it. Cry it. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. Thank you that it teaches us.

Thank you that it gives us answers, that it gives us remedy. Give us courage, Lord, those of us who are experiencing this dust and this heaviness.

Grant us the courage, Lord, to take that small step and just pour out our soul and then cry to you for relief, for help, for direction.

we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.