

GOD'S EMBRACE IN OUR GRIEF

PSALM 116

MAIN POINT

Grief is part of being human, but we can embrace grief as God embraces us.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever had the experience of walking with someone who was grieving? Has someone walked with you through your grief?

What counsel would you share to someone who finds themselves in a position of comforting someone in grief?

Grief is a part of life. We can't get rid of it or ignore it, and yet it is a challenge to serve someone in grief. What do you say? What do you do? Fortunately, the Bible is not silent on this subject, and one of the things we can encourage others to do in their grief is go to the Lord. Psalm 116 teaches us that we can embrace grief because God embraces us as we grieve.

UNDERSTANDING

READ PSALM 116:1-4 (CSB).

¹ I love the LORD because he has heard my appeal for mercy.

² Because he has turned his ear to me, I will call out to him as long as I live.

³ The ropes of death were wrapped around me, and the torments of Sheol overcame me; I encountered trouble and sorrow.

⁴ Then I called on the name of the LORD: "LORD, save me!"

Why did the writer state he was thanking God in prayer?

Why is prayer such an important part of the grieving process?

Many Christians know the joy of deep, personal prayer with God, in both good times and bad. They find that regular times of prayer bring their lives more completely into harmony with His purpose. Others do not realize the tremendous opportunity they are missing and pray only at meals, bedtime, and other occasional moments of serious need. Regular periods of prayer help to bring our lives into harmony with God's purpose. At the same time, life sometimes brings sudden, great challenges, and we then join the psalmist in praying "Lord, save me!" God stands ready to hear us whatever situation we face. The important thing is that we remember to call on Him and trust Him when we do.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 116:5-8 (CSB).

⁵ *The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is compassionate.*

⁶ *The LORD guards the inexperienced; I was helpless, and he saved me.*

⁷ *Return to your rest, my soul, for the LORD has been good to you.*

⁸ *For you, LORD, rescued me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.*

What kinds of feelings and thoughts does a person have when physically or emotionally exhausted?

In light of these kinds of emotions, why was the writer able to rest in God? How does “resting in God” express thanks to Him?

The psalmist fully recognized God as the Source of his deliverance. The Lord had rescued him from the death that earlier threatened him (Psalm 116:3). We live in a fast-paced world filled with pain and grief at every turn. Sometimes we may even think we would like the world to stop spinning so we can get off! Many of us have so much to do, we find getting a good night's sleep difficult. Doctors tell us we need to get enough physical rest, but the Bible encourages us to rest in God. The Lord Jesus called His followers to come to Him with their burdens and find rest (Matt. 11:28-29). We find our ultimate security in Him.

Read Hebrews 13:6. How does knowing God is for you, embracing you throughout life, help you face life's difficulties?

Since God provides for His people (see Matt. 6:25-34), believers can courageously face difficulties. The writer of Hebrews quoted Psalm 118:6. Literally, the Hebrew text has “(with) Yahweh for me.” God's presence and support banish fear of what others can do. We all need these words as we live the difficulties and grief life throws at us.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 116:9-11 CSB).

⁹ *I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.*

¹⁰ *I believed, even when I said, “I am severely oppressed.”*

¹¹ *In my alarm I said, “Everyone is a liar.”*

What does it mean to walk before the Lord?

What does verse 11 tell us about the psalmist's trust in God and trust in others? How might we feel the same way as we experience grief?

The word “walk” means to “live.” Therefore, walking with God means to live for God and be obedient to Him. In his alarm, the psalmist looked around and affirmed everyone is a liar. His desperate condition may have heightened his awareness of people's universal sinful condition (Rom. 3:4, 23). He ultimately could trust no one but God. God calls us to live in complete trust that He is good. Walking with God will bring our lives fulfillment we cannot know in any other way.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 116:12-19 (CSB).

¹² How can I repay the LORD for all the good he has done for me?

¹³ I will take the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD.

¹⁴ I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.

¹⁵ The death of his faithful ones is valuable in the LORD's sight.

¹⁶ LORD, I am indeed your servant; I am your servant, the son of your female servant. You have loosened my bonds.

¹⁷ I will offer you a sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the LORD.

¹⁸ I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people,

¹⁹ in the courts of the LORD's house— within you, Jerusalem. Hallelujah!

What indication do we have from these final verses that the psalmist really sensed God's embrace in the midst of grief?

How did he plan to repay God for His compassion and deliverance?

Can we ever repay God for His goodness to us? If yes, in what way? If no, what is the basis for worship?

Why is worship important even while we are experiencing grief?

APPLICATION

In what ways have you failed to recognize God's embrace during your grief? How might His Word continue to remind you of His presence?

Based on our study, how might we be able to better pray for and encourage those in our lives who are currently dealing with grief? Are there specific words of encouragement we might use to help them accept God's embrace?

PRAY

Close your group time in prayer. Thank God for His care, compassion, and deliverance as we experience the grief of this life. Pray for group members who are currently experiencing or have recently experienced a time of grief. Pray that we would be able to encourage one another in our walk with the Lord as we all deal with grief. Pray that our hearts would worship—even during the difficult times.

COMMENTARY

PSALM 116

Verse 1. The psalmist began with a declaration, "I love the LORD." He later would share other reasons for loving God, but first he affirmed God heard his appeal (literally "voice"). Heard does not denote mere hearing but listening with an intent to action. The word translated mercy stresses the psalmist's recognition of his dependence on God to help him (Ps. 28:2, "pleading"). It is related to the words translated "gracious" and "generously" in Psalm 112:4-5, which we studied in the previous lesson. The psalmist expressed his love for God for hearing his prayers.

Verse 2. The Lord turned His ear to the psalmist's request. This concept is even more personal than "heard" in verse 1 and suggests a careful, deliberate consideration of the psalmist's petition. Thus God is attentive to prayer. I will call describes talking to God about anything good or bad—calling on Him in light of the relationship he has with God. Talking with the Lord about everything just makes sense! The words out to Him do not actually appear in the Hebrew text but are clearly implied by the context. The expression as long as I live literally means "in my days." As long as the psalmist had days to live, he wanted to live them in harmony with God.

Verse 3. The psalmist's word pictures highlight the desperate nature of his situation. He felt as if ropes of death were wrapped around him! The identical Hebrew expression also occurs in Psalm 18:4, where it describes David's desperate situation as he faced King Saul and other enemies. The parallel expression torments of Sheol further accentuates the life-threatening nature of the psalmist's situation. Sheol typically describes death and the grave, the place where the dead go. (See Ps. 88:3.)

The word translated overcame literally means "found" and conveys the idea that the ropes and torments had a life of their own as they worked together against the psalmist. The word trouble is related to the word "torments." Encountered literally means "found" and is related to the word translated overcame. The word sorrow denotes deep emotional pain or grief, as when a parent loses a child (Gen. 44:31). The psalmist appeared trapped.

Verse 4. The psalmist called to God in his distress. The word order of the Hebrew text emphasizes the power present in the name of the LORD. The psalmist's brief prayer LORD, save me! expresses a deep plea, or entreaty. The psalmist needed God's help right then, and he needed it desperately.

Verse 5. The psalmist affirmed three of God's attributes that shaped the Lord's dealings with him. Gracious denotes the extending of undeserved favor toward people. Righteous denotes both the inner quality of integrity and the right behavior that flows from it. Compassionate describes a deep inner feeling of sympathy for the needs others have.

Verse 6. The word guards also means "watches over" and again suggests God's tender care. Inexperienced also can be translated "simple" or "open-minded." Inexperienced people are not as discerning with regard to making good choices (Prov. 9:4) or bad choices (Prov. 7:7) and thus especially need God's care. But God offers protection to such people.

Verse 7. Rest depicts a place or state of unthreatened security. The same word describes the resting place of a bird (Gen. 8:9, "resting place") as well as the security Ruth obtained when she married Boaz (Ruth 3:1, "security"). A related word occurs in Psalm 23:2 to describe calm, "quiet" waters suitable for sheep.

Verse 8. The psalmist fully recognized God as the Source of his deliverance. The Lord had rescued him from the death that earlier threatened him (Ps. 116:3). God dried up his eyes that flowed with tears of sorrow and guarded his feet from stumbling.

Verse 9. What would the psalmist do in response to God's delivering him? He would walk before the LORD; that is, he would live in a way that fully honored God. He would live in obedience, surrendering his life to

the Lord in complete trust. As he did, he would follow in the spiritual footsteps of his forefather Abraham, who likewise walked before the Lord. The expression land of the living occurs commonly to describe life on earth (Ps. 27:13). The prophet Isaiah foretold Jesus' death by saying "He was cut off from the land of the living" (Isa. 53:8).

Verse 10. The word believed comes from the word from which we get our word "amen." It means "to cause to be confirmed." Even when the psalmist found himself severely afflicted, he confirmed God's faithfulness in his own heart. He lived in continuous surrender to God, displaying faith in all circumstances.

Verse 11. Alarm denotes a state of severe fright. In his alarm the psalmist looked around and affirmed everyone is a liar. His desperate condition may have heightened his awareness of people's universal sinful condition (Rom. 3:4,23). He ultimately could trust no one but God.

Verse 12. The psalmist actually never could repay the LORD for all the good God had done in his life. His rhetorical question affirmed His utter dependence on God's grace.

Verse 13. God's servant would take (literally, "lift up") the cup of salvation, an allusion to bringing a drink offering of gratitude to the temple (Lev. 23:13). He would worship the LORD (literally, "call on the name of the Lord") in this way as a public testimony.

Verse 14. The Law of Moses did not require the Israelites to make vows to the LORD, but people who made vows were to fulfill them completely (Deut. 23:21-23). The psalmist fulfilled his vows in the presence of all His people, not to draw attention to Himself but to encourage others. In this way the psalmist stressed the importance of public worship. His worship would inspire others to worship.

Verse 15. The psalmist earlier had affirmed how God rescued him from death (Ps. 116:3,8). Whenever death comes for God's faithful ones, it is always valuable, or precious, in the LORD'S sight. The triumphant end of an earthly life lived for God is a special moment.

Verse 16. The affirmation LORD, I am indeed your servant reveals another aspect of the psalmist's relationship with God. The Hebrew word translated servant literally means "slave." A slave had no rights in the ancient era and found fulfillment in doing his master's will. So it was with the psalmist and his Heavenly Master. He found his highest joy in serving God. The designation the son of Your female servant stresses the psalmist's godly heritage. His mother had served God faithfully, and he would too. The Lord had loosened the psalmist's bonds by rescuing him from the adversity of death.

Verse 17. The Law of Moses outlined procedures for a sacrifice of thanksgiving (Lev. 7:12-15). God determined how His people were to approach Him; thus, if the people brought a thanksgiving offering, they were to bring it as He prescribed. As in verse 13, the expression worship the LORD literally means "call on the name of the Lord".

Verse 18. God's servant again affirmed he would fulfill the vows he had made to the LORD. He probably had made vows when he asked God to deliver him from his enemies and life-threatening circumstances (Ps. 116:3-4,10-11). Perhaps others had heard his vows to God, so the psalmist thought fulfilling them in the very presence of all His people was especially important. In response to God's deliverance, he would bring glory to God through His public worship and praise.

Verse 19. As the Law of Moses commanded, the psalmist fulfilled his vows in the courts of the LORD'S house, where he brought his sacrifices of thanksgiving (Ps. 84:2,10). The temple stood in Jerusalem, the city King David had made Israel's capital and to which he had brought the ark of the covenant (2 Sam. 5:5-9; 6:1-23). His son Solomon would complete the temple around 960 B.C. The psalm ended with the exclamation hallelujah!—a command for all God's people everywhere to praise the Lord.