
Candid Confessions: *what happens when the Bible's reality becomes personal reality? Pt.2*

Psalm 119

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Introduction *The Big Idea: Candid confessions to God happen when the bible's reality becomes our personal reality.*

“O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you. My soul thirst for you, my body longs for you in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live and in your name I will lift up my hands. (ps.63:1-4)

I long to be with you. My eyes shed streams of tears. I become tired and my vitality dries up within me. Hear me when I cry, “when will you comfort me?”. The arrows of hatred are aimed at me all the day long. Hurling toward me are their darts of derision and scorn. I am shot up by those who hate you. I suffer at their hands . . . but sadly I sin with my own.

The insolent—those whose hearts are covered in fat; whose souls are dead and do not delight in You—are not the only ones who sin. Sin comes at me like arrows from evil archers but also sin comes from me shooting at You when I distrust You. I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight. I have gone astray like a lost sheep.

Forgive me. Seek me. Help me. Revive me. O my God, I am yours; save me”!

This is the world of Psalm 119. Open your bibles please to Psalm 119.

Here's my question to start today's message. How can the author of Psalm 119 be so open to God about his suffering and sinning? Have you noticed the personal nature of his prayers? They are direct. They are concrete. There is nothing abstract about his relationship with God. He is open, honest, and genuine with his vulnerable, intimate and even incriminating issues. He shares his personal experiences with God in self-disclosing ways. We might call this *Candid Confessions to God*.

So I come back to the essence of my original question – a question that will be answered at the end of the message. What does the psalmist know about God that causes him to candidly confess his sin and suffering to God? How can he be brutally honest with God and yet stand before him in love and confidence? Whether it is his pain, limitations, weaknesses or whether he discloses his doubt, dread or even his drift away from God . . . he tells God.

The answer to these questions is important to us because today, God is calling us to do the same. The aim of today's message is to pray and preach in such a way that God causes us to candidly confess to him both our sin and suffering. We are to leave the Chapel today (having listened to this message) with hope and conviction to genuinely talk to God the same way the psalmist does. We are setting out to experience this in the following way.

1. Pray – First, we will pray. The only way we will candidly confess to God is if God does a work in our hearts. He is the one and only one who can change us. Cf. 119:18, 36 = open my eyes and incline my heart = to recognize and relish your wonders.
2. Preach – Next, I will preach. He changes us only by his Word and Spirit. The message I preach today comes directly out of Psalm 119. We will hear the psalmist talking to God about his suffering and sinning. The surprise begging for insight will come as we notice how he responds to each of these difficulties.
3. Ponder – Finally, nearing the end of the message, I will give you one verse that comes from Psalm 119. I will use this verse to summarize Psalm 119 and to suggest that the verse gives us insight into God’s heart. This verse will answer the question, “why does the psalmist want to be so vulnerable to God”? I give you this verse to memorize and meditate upon it throughout the upcoming week. We are asking God to use this verse to cause us to experience candid confessions to him – confessions of our sin and suffering.

Let’s begin by praying.

Pray

(Pray Psalm 119:18 and 36)

Preach

With your bibles open to Psalm 119, the first thing we will notice from Psalm 119 is what the psalmist experiences. We will see him suffering. And we will see him sinning.

The psalmist experiences

The writer of our current psalm saw clearly that he lived in the midst of enemies.⁵ In vv.81-88, for example, he lifts up his voice to God crying,

My soul longs for your salvation; I hope in your word. My eyes long for your promise; I ask, “when will you comfort me?” For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke, yet I have not forgotten your statutes. How long must your servant endure? When will you judge those who persecute me? The insolent have dug pitfalls for me; they do not live according to your law. All your commandments are sure; they persecute me with falsehood; help me! They have almost made an end of me on earth, but I have not forsaken your precepts. In your steadfast love give me life that I may keep the testimonies of your mouth.

Suffering

In these verses we hear the psalmist hit bottom. This is his experience. He suffers. And he holds nothing back from God. He hurts. He weeps. He questions. He endures. The effect persecution has on him left him confessing, “they almost made an end of me on earth.” Some form of personal attack leaves him feeling as though he is dying.

⁵Galatians 4:29 clearly affirms that OT believers were “born of the Spirit”. The verse, furthermore, teaches the biblical theology of persecution. That is, just as Cain killed Abel, just as Ishmael persecuted his brother Isaac, so too there is enmity between all who are born according to the flesh (i.e. unregenerate seed of Serpent [Gen.3:15]) and those born according to the Spirit (i.e. regenerate). This explains how the psalmist is alive to God and rejoices in his Word while the insolent hate him.

Psalm 119:81-88 is a sample of what we find throughout Psalm 119. It becomes clear as you take 16 minutes to read the entire Psalm that suffering is a significant theme for God's people. The writer of the Psalm does not merely conclude this based on experience. Remember, he is not only an inspired bible writer, he is a bible reader. He has at least the first five books of the bible accessible to him; Gen, Ex, Lev, Num, Deut.

These books assume that since the fall the people of God suffer. Throughout the entire bible you can hear people groaning and crying and grieving and dreading. These experiences throughout the entire bible are captured in a small space called Psalm 119.

If you have your pens ready, jot down the following passages that relate the whats and whys of God's people suffering. Jot down Genesis 3:15 with cross reference to Gal.4:29. In these two verses, we notice the difference between people motivated like Cain and people motivated like Able. We are introduced to a biblical theology of war between the two descendants (the tale of two seeds), the very war you sense in Psalm 119. You can also scribble down other references that help you understand the world of Psalm 119 such as Exodus 3:7,8; Judges 2:18; Romans 8:22ff. Or full length NT books such as Hebrews, 1 Peter and Revelation.

Wherever you turn in the bible, wherever you see people yearning for the one true God, you will notice that the people of God suffer. That is simply a given. The Psalmist loved the Lord and his Word. And because of this, he both stood out as a lover of God and as a target for persecution (see John 8:31-47; 15:18). As the bible says, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12).

This is the life of the psalmist. He experiences injustice, ridicule, slander, betrayal, political persecution, just to name a few. In other words, he is a sufferer. But he is not just a sufferer. He is also a sinner as we notice at the beginning of Psalm 119.

Sinning

In v9, we witness the young writer confessing to God "how can a young man keep his way pure"? Here, we listen to the cries of a young man aware of his temptations. He knows the forces of sin that both attack him and attract him. He does not trust himself to navigate the dangers in this world. He confesses his need of God. C. H. Spurgeon said this of the psalmist,

He wishes to choose a clean way, to be himself clean in it . . . but, alas, his way is already unclean by actual sin which he has already committed and he himself has within his nature a tendency towards that which defiles.⁶

"Many people live in darkness and ignorance about their own hearts", writes Kris Lundgaard, [yet] "getting to know indwelling sin, as humiliating and discouraging as it can be is our wisdom".⁷ This is how we meet our psalmist in 119. He takes dead aim

⁶C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: An Expository and Devotional Commentary on the Psalms* vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, repr.1984), 32.

⁷Kris Lundgaard, *The Enemy Within: Straight Talk about the Power and Defeat of Sin* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1998), 27.

at the heart of ongoing sin. He is urgent. He is concerned. He cries out to God about his propensity to wander.

This bent to go astray is confirmed as we see how he ends the longest psalm in the Psalter. Look with me at v176. After all his confessions of God's greatness and goodness, after his heart-felt confessions of his suffering and sinning he ends with a brutally honest confession, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep." Our psalmist sounds at times like the Apostle Paul who said, "who will rescue me from this body of death"? (Rom.7:24) This is sad. This is serious. His candid confessions to God reflect the truth that God's people struggle with the continued presence of sin.

The reality of personal sin is not a shocker for those living an examined life. Nobody should be surprised from these confessions. Can't we all echo Robinson's lyrics, "bind my wandering heart to thee. Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love."⁸ The surprise for me as I prepared this series was not that God's people suffer and sin. The wonder of Psalm 119 is the topic to which we now turn our attention.

The Psalmist Responds

We now are making a shift from the writer's experiences to the writer's responses. It has been demonstrated that the writer of Ps. 119 suffered greatly and that he struggled with the presence of sin in his life. But the amazing feature of this psalm is what he does with what he experiences. He does not try to fake it as though he is not hurting. He is not merely pointing out how the world hates God-lovers. The facet of this psalm that fascinates me is how genuinely open he is to God about his experiences.

Amidst enemies, in the throes of suffering, and struggling with sin he goes to God and talks plainly to God. He does not grumble to family and friends. He does not vent to bystanders. Nor, does he simply talk about God as he experiences difficulties. No. He candidly confesses to God of his suffering and sinning – about the injustices, about the lies that are spread about him, how he is smeared in slander and shamed in ridicule. Take a listen to a sample of sincere talk to God.

- Like v81: "My soul longs for your salvation; I hope in our word". Notice how tired he is yet still hoping in the word.
- Or v83: "For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke, yet I have not forgotten your statutes". His vitality shrivels and his vigor dries up. He is losing his strength and animation but does not forget God's promises.

⁸Lyrics taken from the hymn "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" written in 1758 by Robert Robinson.

They are like a love letter to him. There is something about God that has captured him so that whatever God reveals in written form are like precious promises to him.

- Or take a listen to these verses. V.87-88: “They have almost made an end of me on earth but I have not forsaken your precepts. In your steadfast love give me life.” The way he describes himself is staggering. “they almost made an end of me on earth.” In his darkest times, in the moment he felt a death sentence delivered to him, he ascribes lovingkindness to God. He demonstrates how he knows God is sovereign over his suffering. He could give him life immediately. But he does not believe that dark and dangerous times mean that God is unloving. Oh, what is it that the psalmist knows to be true about God that causes him to candidly confess to God everything about his life?

To bring us to the destination of this morning’s message, turn with me to a verse that summarizes all of Psalm 119. Listen carefully as I read for us the first part of verse 94. I want you to ask yourself the question as you hear this verse, “What does the psalmist see in God that causes him to open to him?”

I am yours; save me.

He is abandoned to God, is he not? He is owned by God . . . and loves it. He utterly trusts God. He freefalls into his arms. He is irretrievably caught by his splendor and beauty. God has no rivals for this man’s heart to entertain. The psalmist is uninhibited as he tells God that he is gladly possessed by him. This phrase, “I am yours” is found in another place in the Bible. We find the intimate phrase in a book that was written likely by the son of the author of Psalm 119. In the Song of Songs 6:3, the wife of the king says to the king, “I am beloved’s and my beloved is mine.” I will close the message by relaying a personal story to illustrate how the psalmist (and how we) can be so open about our suffering and sinning to God.

25 yrs. ago Lisa and I were married. We had a bible verse engraved on the inside of my wedding band. The verse is Song of Songs 6:3. I still can read it. On the morning of December 21, 1991 I called my bride to be on the phone and read to her these words taken from the Song of Songs. “Arise, my love, my beautiful one and come away, for behold the winter is past the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth the time of singing has come . . . I am my beloveds and my beloved is mine.

Lisa heard those words and came. Unhindered, unconstrained she unfurled her life to me. And still after 25 years, she candidly confesses to me of her pain and perplexity, of her sin and suffering. And the reason why she is honest and vulnerable with her sharing is that she feels safe in my presence. I am my beloved’s. And my beloved is mine.

It’s a living parable, isn’t it, of Eph.5 where we notice Jesus and his bride the church. “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her that he might sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word” (eph.5:25-26). Because Christ’s bride the church was suffering and sinning he came to earth. He entered the suffering so that he would one day end all of suffering. On the cross, he became sin who knew no sin in order

that we might become the righteousness of God in him. And in doing this on the Cross he did it all. We now who believe in Jesus come to God through him and candidly confess to God our sin and suffering. He who knows us best loves us most. And he is calling us today not to hide from him anymore. Come, come to God through Christ and candidly confess to Him your sin and suffering.

This appeal today will only feel appealing when we believe like John Bunyan who said of his suffering in 1672,

I was made to see that if ever I would suffer rightly, I must . . . live upon God [who] is invisible.⁹

Today's invitation will only feel inviting as we trust like Jeremiah the prophet back in his grueling days of 588 BC who cried out to God in his sin and suffering,

Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.¹⁰

Please stand with me and together read the closing prayer to God from hearts touched by God.

Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things.
Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things.
Make me understand the way of your precepts
and I will meditate on your wondrous works.
Enlarge my heart so that I will run
in the way of your commandments.
Let your steadfast love come to me.
I am yours; save me.

⁹Quote taken from John Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God: The Fruit of Affliction in the Lives of John Bunyan, William Cowper, and David Brainerd* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), 40.

¹⁰Lamentations 3:22,23