

## **A Life of Thankfulness, Love, and Trust (Psalm 116)**

Psalms: Pour Out Your Heart to Him

Zionsville Fellowship | July 27, 2025 | Drew Hunter

Here's a vision of life that every Christian wants: A life marked by love, trust, and thankfulness.

A life marked not by a cold distance from God, but a warm, heartfelt love. Not anxious worry, but confident trust in God's care. Not grumbling discontentment, but joyful thankfulness. Sincere love, confident trust, and joyful thankfulness.

Now, every true Christian has these in some measure. They fluctuate from day to day, or season to season. Some of us hear this and think we're far from these marking our lives. Others of us hear this and recognize this is increasingly true of us. All of us want this more.

And if you're not yet a Christian, you know something of this desire. You want a life marked by love and confidence and thankfulness. And this morning is an opportunity to hear why these are central the Christian life. And also how it is that we can live this way.

So here's the question: How can we experience love, trust, and thankfulness more and more?

The answer is—by orienting (and reorienting) our hearts toward Jesus—who he is and how he saves us through his life, death, and resurrection.

If you are Christian, you do know Christ and the salvation he's give you. But if you're cold toward God, anxious about your life, and discontent with what you have—then Christ and the gospel have drifted from view. Jesus and his grace toward us start to lose their impact on our emotions and lives. But as we reorient our hearts toward him it kindles this life of love, trust, and thankfulness.

This is what we see in Psalm 116.

This Psalm helps us see how to respond to God's salvation—and not just how we respond one time, but how we continually respond. The Psalm is a celebration of deliverance. It's a very personal song. Derek Kidner, in his commentary, said "There is an infectious delight and touching gratitude about this psalm, the personal tribute of a man whose prayer has found an overwhelming answer."<sup>i</sup>

**The question this morning is this: How do we live a life of enduring love, trust, and thankfulness? And the answer is: By continually responding to Christ's death and resurrection for us.**

[Psalm 116]

- 1 I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.
  - 2 Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.
  - 3 The snares of **death** encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish.
  - 4 Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!"
  - 5 Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful.
  - 6 The LORD preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me.
  - 7 Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.
  - 8 For you have delivered my soul from **death**, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling;
  - 9 I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.
  - 10 I believed, even when I spoke: "I am greatly afflicted";
  - 11 I said in my alarm, "All mankind are liars."
  - 12 What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me?
  - 13 I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD,
  - 14 I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.
  - 15 Precious in the sight of the LORD is the **death** of his saints.
  - 16 O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant. You have loosed my bonds.
  - 17 I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the LORD.
  - 18 I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people,
  - 19 in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem.
- Praise the LORD!

Before we walk through this, I want to help us read this Psalm at three levels.

1. *First, this is God's deliverance of an anonymous Israelite believer.* We don't know who wrote this, and we don't know the details of how God delivered him. Very often the Psalms lack these kinds of details so they can apply to any believer. This is a Psalm for anyone who has been in distress and God delivered them.
2. *Second, this ultimately shows us experience of Jesus.* When the New Testament authors tell the story of Jesus, they often reference Psalms like this one. They do this to show how Jesus actually lived these Psalms out to the fullest extent. He came to be one of us, and to experience what we experience. And so the Psalms are the songs of Jesus.

And with this one in particular, it's part of a stretch of Psalms that were read at Passover. This is Psalms 113–118. They were used to praise God for his deliverance of them from slavery in Egypt at Passover. And as they remembered that deliverance, they looked ahead to a greater one. They used these Psalms to cultivate hope for an ultimate salvation from sin and death and the brokenness of this world. And they would sing these Psalms at Passover as they remembered and hoped.

And then Jesus came and he planned his death to correspond with Passover—because he came to bring this greater deliverance. He is the true Passover lamb, the sacrifice for our sins, the one to deliver us.

The night before he died, he hosted a Passover meal, which we call the Lord's Supper. And he transformed that meal—making it about the salvation he brought through his death.

And after the that meal, the gospel writers say he sang a song with his disciples.<sup>ii</sup> Most scholars say he would have sung from the stretch of psalms from 113 to 118. This section of the Psalter was on Jesus's lips as he went to the cross for us. This Psalm helps us know Jesus—and his own distress, death, and deliverance.

3. *The third level that we can read this Psalm is about our salvation in Christ.* This Psalm ultimately tells the story of how God delivers us from our distress and death. It tells the story of how God delivers us through Jesus.

We should often have these three levels in view when we read the Psalms.

1. First, we read this as the experience of distress and deliverance of this particular Israelite.
2. Then we read it as fulfilled in Jesus's experience of distress in death and deliverance in the resurrection.
3. And finally we read it as our experience—as those who have been delivered through Christ.

So, we read this as the man's story, which points to Jesus's story, which becomes our story.

We'll walk through the two halves of this Psalm. The first is the experience of distress and rescue. The second is the response of trust and thankfulness. We'll have all three levels in view as we go. Our hope is that it will rekindle in us—love, trust, and thankfulness.

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## **1. The Experience of Distress and Rescue (v1–9)**

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First, the experience of distress and rescue.

The first verse introduces the whole Psalm. He says he loves the Lord because he heard and answered his prayer for deliverance.

And then he tells the story of what happened. He was distressed because he was brought to point of death. He describes death as an aggressive enemy in verse 3: “The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish.” It’s as though death had ropes wrapped around him. It was reaching toward him with a trap to lock him in and bring him down. Sheol is the place of the dead—and it was grabbing him and pulling him in.<sup>iii</sup>

He doesn’t tell us what exactly happened. It could have been a life-threatening disease or sickness. He could have been crushed down with depression. Whatever happened he was in anguish and he thought his life was over. So he cried out to God for deliverance in verse 4: “Then I called on the name of the LORD: “O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!”

This distressed prayer on the edge of death sounds a lot like Jesus in his final hours.

Language like “snares of death,” “pangs of Sheol,” “anguish and distress” are used throughout the Psalms. And these experiences are picked up in the New Testament and applied to Jesus.<sup>iv</sup> Jesus himself quotes from one of these kinds of Psalms in Gethsemane—saying his soul was cast down and deeply troubled.<sup>v</sup> Gethsemane is the garden where he was overwhelmed with distress. He was hours away from the cross. And he collapsed to the ground, sweat drops of blood, and cried out to the Father.

No one has ever been as distressed as Jesus in that hour. When he was in Gethsemane, the snares of death were reaching for him. The shadow of the grave darkened his sight. He could already feel the radiating heat of the cross.

One of my favorite poems of George Herbert is *The Sacrifice*. He walks through the story of Jesus’s betrayal, distress, trial, and crucifixion. It’s written from Jesus’s perspective. In each stanza he describes what he went through, then he asks the question, “Was ever grief like mine?”

The mockery, the betrayal, the false accusations, the physical abuse, and the crucifixion. Stanza after stanza, moment after moment—dozens of times in the psalm, we hear him ask the question, “was ever grief like mine?” It’s repeated after every refrain until we come to a singular moment on the cross. Then it changes from a question to a statement.

But, O my God, my God! why leav’st thou me,  
The son, in whom thou dost delight to be?  
My God, my God—

Never was grief like mine.

It’s not a question now, but a statement. He experienced the distress of this Psalm to the fullest extent. And so in the first four verses of this Psalm, we hear his distress.

Then in verses 5–9 we see the deliverance.

The Psalmist wrote, “5 Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful. 6 The LORD preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me. 7 Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you. 8 For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling; 9 I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.”

He draws attention to God’s good and kindhearted character in verse 5. This is why he could trust God to rescue him. Because this is who God is. This is what he is like. And so God delivered him.

And this is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus.

Jesus cried out for deliverance in Gethsemane. As the cross was right before him, he prayed for the cup of God’s wrath to pass. And yet he was not spared death. But that doesn’t mean he wasn’t delivered. He was delivered in the resurrection. The Father did answer his prayer. The Father did deliver him. He brought him through death, and then out the other side on the third day. And now he lives in the land of the living, and he will return.

And this is why we can be delivered through death as well. Yes, God may spare us from near-death experiences like the man who wrote this. But our greatest need to be delivered from eternal death. And Jesus endured death and judgment in our place. So that though we may still die, one day we will be raised. Our eternal judgment fell on Jesus; so it will never fall on us.

It is Jesus’s experience of this Psalm that allows it to also become our Psalm. Jesus experienced distress and the cords of death for us, and he was delivered. And he did it so that he could answer us when we call out for salvation. So that we could be delivered from sin, and death, and judgment—and we could live in the land of the living now and forever.

And I love what the Psalmist said in verse 7.

He said, “Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.” I’ve opened many of our Sunday services with this verse. It expresses perfectly what we’re doing here on Sundays. Our soul is restless, and we were made to find our rest in God. And when God delivers us, and shows his kindness, and deals bountifully with us—we know he is the source of our rest.<sup>vi</sup>

Jesus himself said that he is the source of rest: He said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:28–29).

And so we want our soul to keep returning to him for rest. And that's what this Psalmist does. God has proven himself as the only place of true rest for our souls.

If you are not yet trusting in Christ for salvation, then you can call out to him. We all need to be delivered. Death is coming, and then judgment. But God is the God who saves.

And the reason Jesus came was to make this Psalm his own, so that it could also become yours. He endured the distress and death you deserve, so you can share in the eternal life he secured. Our souls are longing for rest, and they will only find it in him.

This is the experience of distress and deliverance. Now, the second half of the Psalm shows us how to respond.

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## **2. The Enduring Response of Grateful Trust (v10–19)**

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So, second, the enduring response of grateful trust.

We first see his trust even in the midst of the trial in verses 10–11. He says, “I believed, even when I spoke: ‘I am greatly afflicted’; 11 I said in my alarm, ‘All mankind are liars.’” Even as he was afflicted and in distress, he trusted the Lord. He recognized that everyone else is ultimately unreliable. Only the Lord is thoroughly reliable. God was the only one he could trust.

When Jesus cried to the Lord in Gethsemane, he asked three times for the judgment to pass. But he trusted the Father. He said, “yet not my will, but yours.” And even as he cried out, “Why have you forsaken me,” he still said, “My God, my God.” He couldn't rely on anyone—Judas betrayed him, his disciples fled from him, the Jews handed him over to the Romans, the crowds called for his crucifixion, and the Romans crucified him. Yet he trusted in God.

And then in verse 12, the Psalmist asks how to respond to the Lord's deliverance.

He asks, “What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me?” This is what every Christian now should ask, every day, in response to God's salvation. What should we render to him? How should we respond? We see three responses here in verses 13–14—and he repeats them again at the end of the Psalm.

First, thankfulness.

He says, “I will lift up the cup of salvation.” It seems like this is a toast in honor of the Lord saving him.<sup>vii</sup> He holds up a cup of salvation with thankfulness.

Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, “let this cup pass from me.” That was the cup of God’s wrath and judgment. But then, having drank the cup of wrath to the dregs, Jesus rose, and lifted the cup of salvation. He gives thanks to the Father for rescuing him.

And now we join him in this thanksgiving. God delivered us, he forgave us, he set us free from sin’s power, he removed the sting of death. And so we raise the cup of salvation.

Since God delivers us from a lifetime and eternity of judgment; it warrants a lifetime and eternity of giving thanks.

Every day, this can be our posture. We can raise a toast to the saving goodness of God.

Second, trust.

He called on God’s name, and God delivered him. And now he says in verse 13 that he will *keep calling* on the name of the Lord.

Now, that’s interesting isn’t it? He called on God’s name when he was in distress, and God delivered him. So what does he commit to do? He commits to keep calling on God’s name. This is a posture of dependence.

We do not just trust God in the moment of distress; we keep trusting him. If God has delivered you—in salvation, and in mini-deliverances in your life—give this commitment to him. Tell him that you know he has been faithful, and so you will keep calling on his name.

The contrast to this would be living with anxious fear every day. We worry about the worst possible future. We live anxious about money, and our job, or a relationship, or our kids. And instead, we call on God’s name and trust him through whatever comes.

The final response is paying vows.

In verse 14, he says, “I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.” He promised something to God if he delivered him. And now that God delivered him, he will pay his vow.

Sometimes people make vows to God. Maybe you’ve been in a hard spot, and you promised God something if he delivered you. And then he did deliver you. So, what do you do? You need to make good on your promise.

Those are the three main responses.

He gives one additional note in verse 15: “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.” What does that mean? The word “precious” means costly, or weighty, or valuable.

What's so striking here is that he says *death* itself is precious. This means death is a costly, weighty, heavy reality to God. In other words, it's not cheap. God is not flippant about it. He doesn't let us die accidentally or apart from his plan.<sup>viii</sup> Death is a weighty reality to him.

Now, from our perspective, sometimes it looks to us like he treats death cheaply. We see other brothers and sisters in Christ die in terrible, quick, surprising ways. But God never lets anything happen to us apart from his infinitely wise and good plan. Romans 8:28 says, “we know that for those who love God all things work together for good.” God works all things, including our death, according to his purposes and for our good.

So, when you approach your death, or when a fellow believer dies, you can bank on this. You can know that God cares, he is involved, he allowed it according to his purposes.

And so this man affirms this because he has been brought near death, and delivered. Death is weighty to God, so he delivered this man from it.

And in the case of Jesus, his death was precious and weighty and costly in the ultimate way. He is the Father's own Son, and he died in order to accomplish our ultimate deliverance. This is why the apostle John writes of the cross as the glory of God displayed. The death of Christ is a precious, weighty, costly reality.

And this also means that for each of us, our ultimate eternal death is weighty to God. And so Jesus bore our judgment for us. So that even if we die, death becomes a doorway to Christ. And we will be raised from the dead one day to live on the new earth, in the land of the living, forever.

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## Implications

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So, here's what we've seen:

The experience of distress and rescue leads to an enduring response of grateful trust. This man experienced it. Jesus experienced it to the full. And now we enter into this as well. God delivered us from our greatest distress, and so we now respond with grateful trust.

As we wrap up, I want to draw attention to one final way to respond.

It's in the very first verse, and it set up the whole Psalm. He introduced this psalm by saying, “I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.” He loves the Lord because the Lord delivered him.

Maybe you love the Lord—every true Christian does, because God delivered us. But sometimes I may say I love the Lord, but it feels abstract. I know it to be true in one sense,



but I also know it grows cold. I don't think about him much. I'm not warm toward him. I don't express myself to him like Psalm 116. Maybe you also often feel this way.

In Revelation 2, Jesus sent a message to Christians in Ephesus saying they abandoned the love they had at first. This can happen in long stretches of life, and it can happen every day.

So, how do we rekindle a love for Christ? How do we live a life of grateful love and trust?

You keep reorienting your heart to Christ and how he delivered you.

You go over, again and again, Jesus's own story of how he saved you.

You see his love for you through it all.

You see the distress he endured in order to rescue you from yours.

You see him drain the cup of wrath on the cross,

and then raise the cup of salvation in his resurrection.

And you see him offer that cup of salvation to you, and you raise it in honor of him.

Every day, you raise the cup of salvation with gratefulness to Christ.

Let every sin you commit become an opportunity to repent and believe again—and thank him for his grace.

Let every experience of overcoming sin and temptation be an opportunity for thanksgiving. He gave you a new heart and his Spirit to empower you to obey him—he gets all the credit.

Let every experience of hardship turn into an opportunity to trust him. Your suffering and death is a precious, weighty reality to him. He will not forsake you or treat you cheaply.

And when your soul feels restless—bring it back to the Lord Jesus, and find your rest in him.

This is how we live a life of love, trust, and thankfulness. We keep orienting our hearts to Christ and the deliverance he accomplished for us.

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<sup>i</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, 442.

<sup>ii</sup> Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26.

<sup>iii</sup> Kidner notes the idea of death and Sheol is aggressive in the OT poetry, “clutching at the living the waste them with sickness or crush them with despondency” (Kidner, 443).

<sup>iv</sup> The “pangs of death” in Acts 2:24 I similar to the LXX of Psalm 116:3, “the snares of death.”

<sup>v</sup> Jesus quotes from the refrain of Psalms 42–43 (LXX) in Mark 14:34. Then on the cross he quotes from Psalm 22.

<sup>vi</sup> “Rest” is plural—rests—which probably refers to a completeness of rest (Christopher Ash, *The Psalms*, 4:238). Since God is the one who dealt bountifully, he is probably the place of rest (James Hamilton, *Psalms Vol II: 73–150*, 327). This language is used in Jeremiah of returning from exile to the land and being give quiet and ease (Jer. 30:10; 46:72). That is fitting in light of its placement in the 5<sup>th</sup> book here; returning to the land. But the Psalmist recognizes that God himself is the place of rest for his life.

<sup>vii</sup> The “cup of salvation” is only mentioned here in the OT. This is probably like a toast to honor the Lord for saving (Christopher Ash, 4:241). It is probably the antithesis of the cup of wrath that is mentioned in Isaiah and other Psalms (Tremper Longman, *Psalms*, 397).

<sup>viii</sup> See Ash, 4:242.