

Psalm 116

I trust Him, even when I say, "I am greatly afflicted."

The Psalm is in two halves. Both halves open with affirmations (*I love him; I trust him*). Both halves have a simple "ring structure" (BCB; DED). At the heart of each "ring" the Psalmist celebrates his experience of salvation (C; E). A recurrent motif of the Psalm is "calling on the Name of the LORD" (vv. 2, 4, 13, 17). Verse 10 sits at the heart of the Psalm: "I believed, even when I spoke: 'I am greatly afflicted.'"

A (vv. 1-2) *I love him – he heard me when I called his Name*

B (vv. 3-4) *The entangling straits from which I called on the Name for rescue*

C (vv. 5-7) *My Saviour and my experience of his salvation*

B' (vv. 8-9) *The comprehensive deliverance you brought me*

A' (vv. 10-11) *I trust him – everyone else disappoints*

D (vv. 12-14) *I respond to his salvation by taking the cup and calling on his Name*

E (vv. 15-16) *I was saved because of our reciprocal commitments*

D' (vv. 17-19) *I respond to his salvation by sacrifice and calling on his Name*

1. I love him (vv. 1-9)

(a) *He heard me when I called on his Name* (vv. 1-2)

"The singer is not only remembering a past occasion but is drawing a lasting assurance from it ('he hears my voice') and making a lifelong resolve ('I will call...', 2). It is a resolve to trust God exclusively (cf. Rom. 10:12f.) and worship Him explicitly (cf. Gn. 4:26; 12:8)" (Kidner, p. 408).

(b) *The entangling straits from which I called on the Name for rescue* (vv. 3-4)

"In Old Testament poetry *death* and *Sheol* are aggressive, clutching at the living to waste them with sickness or crush them with despondency; so the singer's plight may equally have been a desperate illness or (as verse 11 suggests) a wounding and disillusioning experience" (Kidner, p. 408).

The "Name of the LORD" (given emphasis in the Hebrew of v. 4) is the only refuge against the onslaught of death. The psalmist "kept on calling" on God – this becomes a refrain in the Psalm (vv. 2b, 13b, 17b). Calling on the LORD's name = proclaiming who he is, and therefore urging him to act in light of the revelation expressed by his name.

(c) *My Saviour and my experience of his salvation* (vv. 5-7)

"The simple" = those who do not have answers to life's problems and need to turn to God for them. In the OT they have no merit – they are the "gullible, feckless people who roam the pages of Proverbs drifting into trouble" (Kidner, p. 408).

"The plural [rests] signifies full, complete rest, as is found only in God" (Delitzsch).

(d) *The comprehensive deliverance you brought me* (vv. 8-9)

The tripartite description of deliverance suggests its comprehensiveness: soul delivered from death; eye delivered from tears (of the funeral mourner); foot

delivered from stumbling (being thrust down – down into the grave). In effect, "You delivered me from going down into the narrow grave, where you are unknown, absent! Instead you set my feet in broad lands where I can walk with you."

"The *lands* of the living" = the broad land of the living.

2. I trust him (vv. 10-19)

(a) *In alarm I learned that everyone else disappoints* (vv. 10-11)

"The open confession of God, as a duty of faith, pervades the psalm from this point to the end" (James Denney, quoted by Kidner, p. 409).

Verse 10 is difficult. Delitzsch: "I have gathered up faith and *believe* henceforth, *when I speak* (have to speak, must speak): *I am deeply afflicted.*" Goldingay: "The emphasis lies on the confidence despite the pressures – or rather, because of them... Prosaically put, 'I came to trust because I spoke, saying in my trepidation, 'I have become very weak and every human being deceives.'""

Brought low = powerlessness in relation to other people.

Deceitful = failure to fulfil expectations. Therefore "every man is a liar" = human help always disappoints, in contrast to God who never lets us down.

"The author makes a point which his fellow psalmists often illustrate: that to feel crushed (10) or disillusioned (11), and to say so, even in the wild tones of panic..., is no proof that faith is dead; it may even vouch for its survival, as pain betokens life. Indeed, as pain cries out for healing, trouble frankly faced cries out for God" (Kidner, p. 410).

(b) *I respond to his salvation by taking the cup and calling on his Name* (vv. 12-14)

The "cup of salvation" is the opposite of the "foaming cup" of Ps. 75:8.

Literally "cup of salvations" – intensive and complete.

"I will lift up" = "I will take in my hands, I will take hold of".

(c) *I was saved because of our reciprocal commitments* (vv. 15-16)

If "hesed" is covenant love-commitment, then the "hasidim" ("saints") are those who are committed to the LORD. Their death is not nothing to him. "The death of the devout costs Yahweh dear" (JB).

The servant of a servant was the absolute property of the master. This implies even greater security. "One might call the relationship of servant to master a form of bondage, but the positive side to it, especially in the context of the attempted imposition of ropes and restraints by another would-be master (v. 3), makes it more life a form of freedom" (Goldingay, p. 347).

(d) *I respond to his salvation by sacrifice and calling on his Name* (vv. 17-19)

Lifting up the cup of salvation is now replaced by offering a sacrifice of thanksgiving. The act of thanksgiving is another proclamation of the Name of the LORD. The action of thanksgiving-proclamation is public – in the temple precincts, in the middle of Jerusalem – this is happening at the very heart of the corporate people of God.

Panel 1: "I love him"

¹ I love [him] –
because the LORD listened to
my voice, my pleas for mercy;
² because he inclined his ear to me –
and so throughout my days I will call [on him].

³ The cords of death encompassed me,
and the straits of Sheol found me;
I found distress and sorrow.

⁴ **But on the Name of the LORD I kept on calling:**
"Please, O LORD, rescue my soul!"

⁵ Gracious is the LORD, and righteous;
and our God shows compassion.

⁶ The LORD is one who keeps the simple:
I was made low, but he saved me.

⁷ Return, my soul, to your condition of perfect rest,
for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.

⁸ For you have delivered:
my soul from death,
my eye from tears,
my foot from stumbling.

⁹ I will walk to and fro before the LORD
in the broad land of the living.

Panel 2: "I trust him"

¹⁰ I trust [him],
even when I speak:
"I am greatly afflicted."
¹¹ I myself said (when I was alarmed),
"Every man is a liar."

¹² What will I return to the LORD
for all his benefits to me?
¹³ The cup of complete salvation I will lift up,
and on the Name of the LORD I will call.

¹⁴ My vows to the LORD I will fulfil,
indeed before all his people.

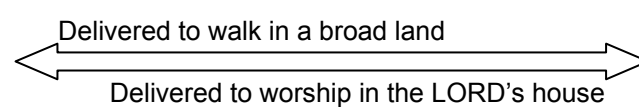
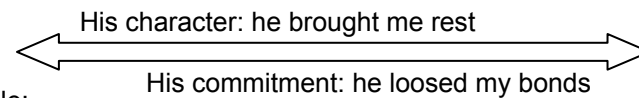
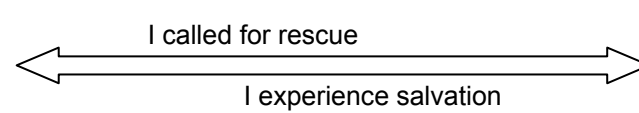
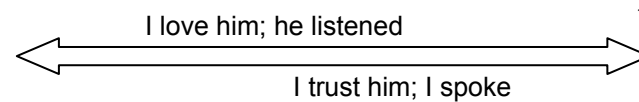
¹⁵ Precious in the eyes of the LORD
is the death of his faithful ones.

¹⁶ Ah, LORD, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the son of your maidservant!
You loosed my bonds.

¹⁷ To you I will sacrifice a sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and on the Name of the LORD I will call.

¹⁸ My vows to the LORD I will fulfil,
indeed before all his people,

¹⁹ in the courts of the house of The LORD,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.



Hallelujah!

There are as many proposed structures for the Psalm as there are commentators. The structure shown above in two "panels" is only tentative. The sections correspond to the outline given in the notes. The horizontal arrows show only some of the interconnections between sections. You can work out other connections for yourself!