

If the LORD had not been on our side . . .

Psalm 124

*If the LORD had not been on our side – let Israel say –
if the LORD had not been on our side when people attacked us,
they would have swallowed us alive when their anger glared against us;
the flood would have engulfed us,
the torrent would have swept over us,
the raging waters would have swept us away.*

Praise be to the LORD, who has not let us be torn by their teeth.

*We have escaped like a bird from the fowler's snare;
the snare has been broken, and we have escaped.*

Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Introduction: "Say it!"

You can almost hear David as he's writing this and also imagine him telling it out loud to a group of his fellow Israelites: *"I have some deep convictions about what would have happened to me and to us if God had not been with us, but I want to hear you say it and let it impact you the way it does me."* So, he told them, "Say it!" Say it out loud and let it grab you. *"If God had not been with us, can you imagine what would have happened?"*

So, let's say it. Stop right now and say it out loud, *"If God had not been with me, . . ."*

Say it again . . . and again.

If you're with a group, say it together, *"If God had not been on our side . . ."*

Without even finishing that sentence, do you already feel its impact?

Now, let's finish the sentence.

This study will focus on two broad categories of life experiences that come to mind when we think of applying what David said here to our own lives. You can probably think of many other applications as well to add to this list.

A. Life experiences that would have been much worse if God had not been on our side.

Two broad categories of difficult life experiences that fit what David described are:

1. When people attacked us.

First of all, we may not understand that people can actually be attacking us. As *Ephesians 6:11 – 12* points out, we are in a spiritual battle. Of course that verse also makes it very clear that the source of that battle is Satan – not the people themselves. But we sometimes might not acknowledge how much their words can hurt us. Because we know how much Jesus has taught us about mercy, forgiveness, love for our enemies, and prayer for them, we might think that we shouldn't be hurt by anything anyone says to us or about us or about our loved ones. But the truth of the matter is that we need extremely powerful spiritual weapons, as described clearly in the next verses of *Ephesians 6*, to even survive these extremely powerful

attacks. The point of this psalm as well as a point of *Ephesians 6* is that God is with us during those times and will give us the tools, the spiritual armor, that will not only help us survive these attacks, but will also help us grow from them. But if we don't acknowledge them as an attack, we might try to survive them on our own power and eventually get discouraged. I don't know about you, but the hurtful things that have been said to or about my loved ones hurt me much more than things said about me. And if I don't acknowledge that hurt, it can turn into bitterness and resentment.

Secondly then, focus on what this psalm is saying about these attacks from people. The truth of the matter is that if God had not been on our side when those attacks happened, they would have swallowed us alive with their anger. It was bad – acknowledge that, as we said above. Don't pretend that it didn't hurt. But it would have been much worse if God had not been with us. Again I will say: I don't know about you, but in my case, I can now easily identify how I grew as a result of the harsh, angry, and hateful things that have been said to me or to my loved ones.

- If they were said by someone who was a leader in the church or in my job, if nothing else it taught me **VERY** clearly the kind of leader that I did **NOT** want to be (as Jesus taught in *Matthew 23:1 – 4* and *Mark 10: 42 – 44*).
- If they were said by someone who was a weak (at the time) member of the church, it taught me clearly what I needed to do in studying and teaching God's word in order to spur others on to love (actual love) and good deeds (*Hebrews 10:24*).
- If they were said by someone outside of the kingdom, it taught me the truth of all of the Scriptures that talk about our example to nonbelievers (such as *2 Timothy 2:25* and *Titus 2:8*), not to mention how extremely difficult it is to do what Jesus said about loving your enemies and praying for those who persecute you (*Matthew 6:43 – 48*).

That is not to say that any of that was easily recognized (or, in some cases, even slightly realized) at the moment. But later on, it became clear (*Hebrews 12:11*). Can you identify with that?

So, pause for a minute and think about the ways people have hurt you or your loved ones. Of course, I am not trying to make you re-live hard times that you may have already successfully dealt with. But at least think in general about the ways people can hurt you by attacking you or your loved ones, and spend some time thinking, writing, and praying about questions such as these:

- Do you see how that was an actual attempt from Satan to use someone else to try to discourage you?
- Have you admitted to yourself and to God how much that hurt?
- Do you see specific core-value principles that God has taught you through those experiences? If so, what are they?
- Is it clear to you how much worse it would have been for your survival if God had not been on your side?

2. When life attacked us.

When David spoke of the flood, the torrent, the raging waters of verses 4 and 5 he was still applying it to the hateful and angry attacks from others mentioned in verse 3. But it's not too hard to see how they can also apply to other difficulties in life. Those times when life just seems to attack us.

There's an old saying that you often hear: "*God will not give us more than we can bear.*" It's an old saying that many people think is an actual Scripture. And it is almost a Scripture, very close to what is said in *1 Corinthians 10:13*. But what that Scripture actually says is that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, and he will always provide a way out of temptation. He will help you resist any temptation. But neither Scripture nor life experiences claim that you will never face situations that are more than you can bear.

If you have ever experienced life situations, like the death of the one who is closest to you in the world, then you know that this is much more than you can bear on your own. That is what drives you to God. Paul said that his difficult experiences were "*far beyond our ability to endure.*" Take a moment to read *2 Corinthians 1:8 – 11*. Did you catch what he said in verse 8? Evidently Paul had never heard the old saying mentioned above. He said that this was more, much more, than he could bear. But you probably know the rest of what he said about how it taught him to rely on God (verse 9).

Again, that is what this psalm is about. If God had not been on our side, this flood would have engulfed us, this torrent would have swept over us, these raging waters would have swept us away. And we all know: they almost did. If God had not been with us, they would have! You may have even experienced a major set back in your walk with God. But if you are reading this psalm today, then you realize the truth of what it is saying to you personally.

I remember as a child swimming in Mulberry Creek in Mulberry, Arkansas and nearly drowning. The "*raging waters*" were actually a tiny creek, but they seemed like raging waters to me at the time. As they swept over me, my life flashed in front of my eyes. Granted at that young age that didn't take very long, but even then it was clear to me that if God had not been with me that day my parents would have faced the tragedy of a drowned child. But it taught me some things, right? For one thing, I knew that I needed to learn to swim. For another thing, I thought that I wanted to make sure that the next time my life flashed in front of my eyes, there were more things that came up in that mental movie. But most of all, it taught me the truth of this psalm when I later read it. I can't remember when I first read it, but I know that this memory came up when I did.

So as we did before, pause for a minute and think about the ways life has hurt you or your loved ones. Again, I am not trying to make you re-live hard times that you may have already successfully dealt with. But at least think in general about the ways life can hurt you by attacking you or your loved ones, and spend some time thinking, writing, and praying about questions such as these:

- Do you see how that was an actual attempt from Satan to use difficulties to try to discourage you?
- Have you admitted to yourself and to God how much that hurt?
- Do you see specific core-value principles that God has taught you through those experiences? If so, what are they?
- Is it clear to you how much worse it would have been for your survival if God had not been on your side?

B. Praises and Clarity.

1. David was very clear about his praises.

"Praise be to the LORD, who has not let us be torn by their teeth." (verse 6)

This was not an accomplishment of our own strength.

- It was a deliverance from the LORD.

God would not let us be *"torn by their teeth."* He didn't prevent it from happening, as much as we may wish that he did. He didn't keep it from hurting, wounding, scaring. (See *Psalm 6, 13, and 22* for other examples of David's laments about the pains and hurts that life can bring.) But he would not let their *"teeth"* totally tear us apart.

REPEAT: GOD WOULD NOT LET THEIR TEETH TEAR US APART! He was not going to let that happen. It was clear to David, and hopefully it is clear to us, that if God had not been on our side . . .

- It was an escape that was impossible to imagine until it happened (verse 7). Imagine for a moment the pure torment of the bird trapped in the snare, furiously and hopelessly trying to escape.

We also were trapped in a way that was totally beyond our ability to escape. And then . . . somehow the trap broke. And we were freed. **NOTE:** We didn't break the snare. *"The snare was broken . . ."* (verse 7). I wonder who broke it?

When that is totally understood by us, it brings a clarity to our lives. We know it was God! Others may compliment you about how strong and faithful you were, but you know it was God who refused to let those *"teeth"* tear you apart.

And, like David, you can't help but praise God for what he has done. That praise has two directions:

- 1) You praise him, brag on him, give him the credit, and recommend him to anyone who will listen, declaring *"the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"* (1 Peter 2:9). You want everyone to know: *"If God had not been on my side . . ."*
- 2) And you praise him directly, give him the credit, and acknowledge his blessings in your words to him. You tell him, because it is 100% clear to you, *"If you had not been on my side . . ."*

You are genuinely amazed about the love of God. So, you praise God to others, and you praise him directly in your prayers and worship and frequent communication with him.

Do you remember the torment of the devil's snare in your life? Is it clear to you: *"I escaped by the hand of God, and I stand amazed in his presence"*?

*I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene,
And wonder how He could love me, a sinner, condemned, unclean.
O how marvelous! O how wonderful! And my song shall ever be.
O how marvelous! O how wonderful is my Savior's love for me!*

Chas H. Gabriel

Spend some time in prayer, praise, and meditation about the way God broke the snare that was in your life.

2. David was also very clear about his assurances.

Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. (verse 8)

Knowing clearly who God is, what he has done and continues to do in our lives, and the reality of his presence on a continual basis brings a confidence, a blessed assurance that is far beyond any level of self-confidence or personal strength.

- It is the clarity of knowing that our help is in God and the power of his name.

The word "help" humbly reminds us of how much we need him. But the statement of assurance found here shows a clarity of mind that is fully aware, not only of how much we need help, but also of how much we can rely on that help. The compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love God (*Exodus 34:6*) is clearly at work when I desperately need him, and in fact he is always at work (*John 5:17*). I need to call on the power of his name.

*I just wanna speak the name of Jesus
Over every heart and every mind.
'Cause I know there is peace within Your presence.
I speak Jesus.*

Charity Gayle

- It is the clarity of personally knowing "*the maker of heaven and earth*" (verse 8).

We've probably all made a few things – with varying degree of success. When it's successful, you might even want to make a *YouTube* video about, and people might even gain some success in following you because they trust in your expertise and helpfulness. But how about being helped by the *Maker of Heaven and Earth*? (See also *Psalms 134:3* and *146:6*.) That's better than any *YouTube* video I've ever seen!

How does that make you feel?

Conclusion: Slowly, read this psalm one more time, letting every word of it sink into your heart.

Read it again slowly and as often as you can.

Now that you have studied this psalm, spend some time meditating, writing, and praying about your convictions and conclusions to questions such as these:

- Is it clear to you that the *Maker of Heaven and Earth* is your helper?
- Are you praising him accordingly? Praising him to others and praising him to his face?
- Do you take captive of that thought and let that thought take captive of you in every situation you face?
- Close by writing a praise to the *Maker of Heaven and Earth* about your convictions about your life "*if God had not been on our side,*" and think about ways you can share that with someone else.

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