

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 with us, . . ."*

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.

I. 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:

A. When people attack us

First of all, we may not understand that people can actually be attacking us. Not physically, but verbally. Scripture points out that we are in a spiritual battle (*Ephesians 6:11 – 12*). Of course Scripture 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. We know how much Jesus has taught us about mercy and forgiveness. He taught us to love our enemies, and pray for them. Because of that, 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 God's help to even survive these extremely hurtful attacks. The point of this psalm as well as so many other Scriptures is that God is with us during those times. He will

give us the tools that will help us survive these attacks. Not only survive them, but also help us grow from them. But if we don't acknowledge them as an attack from Satan, 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 though, 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 (verse 3). 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 identify how I grew as a result of the harsh, angry, hateful, or just insensitive things that have been said to me or to my loved ones. Let me give you some examples for me. It may be different for you, but here are three ways that these attacks helped we grow:

- 1) If they were said by someone who was a leader in the church or 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*). So, that actually helped me.
- 2) If they were said by someone who was a weak (at the time) disciple, it taught me clearly what I needed to study and teach from God's word in order to help them. (Spur others on to love (actual love) and good deeds (*Hebrews 10:24*).) It taught me that I needed to help them, not condemn them or hate them.
- 3) 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's a difficult but important lesson for me to learn.

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. 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. 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 destroy 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. When just life itself attacks us

When David spoke of the flood, the torrent, the raging waters of verse 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. Our health problems, our financial difficulties, the death of a loved one, personal mistakes, social injustices, work problems, crime and violence, church problems.

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. It certainly was for me. But these are the kinds of moments that drive you to God. Paul said that the difficult experiences that he and his companions faced 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. 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 as a result of that difficulty. But if you are reading this psalm today, then you realize the truth of what it is saying to you personally. The problem did some damage, maybe even a lot of damage, but it did not destroy you. Why? Because God was with you, and he would not let that happen.

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. 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 destroy 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?

II. Clarity about Praises and Assurances

You know that life can sometimes be kind of fuzzy and vague. But sometimes we see clearly what's going on. David was very clear about two things: his praises and his assurances. Nothing vague or fuzzy about it.

Look at verse 6: "*Praise be to the LORD, who has not let us be torn by their teeth.*"

A. David was very clear about his praises.

This is not about an accomplishment of our own strength. It is clearly about a deliverance from God. David was very clear about that. It wasn't just a generic "*Praise the Lord.*" He was very clear and specific about his praise.

Look at what David said. God would not let us be "*torn by their teeth.*" God didn't prevent the difficulty, whatever it was, from happening, as much as we may wish that he did. That's because God has an entirely different agenda than Satan does when adversity strikes us. Satan only wants to try to destroy you. God wants you to learn from it and grow stronger. He didn't keep the problem from hurting, wounding, or scarring. (See *Psalm 6, 13, and 22* for examples of David's laments about the pains and hurts that life can bring.) But God would not let the difficulty totally tear us apart. **REPEAT: GOD WOULD NOT LET IT 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 with us, we would have been destroyed.

Verse 7 describes a visual that will stick in our minds. It describes an escape that was impossible to imagine until it happened. 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 to others. You 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

If that is clear to you, then that makes you clear about your praises. Not vague and generic in your praise, but clear and specific. *"I praise you God, because you broke the snare."*

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

B. David was also very clear about his assurances.

Look at verse 8. *"Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth."*

Do you see the assurance that David had?

This is knowing clearly who God is. This is knowing clearly what he has done and continues to do in our lives. This is knowing clearly the reality of his presence on a continual basis. All this clarity 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 comes from 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. A 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 Bible says that God is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love (*Exodus 34:6*). He is clearly at work when I desperately need him. In fact, Jesus said that the Father is always at work (*John 5:17*). God says that he never stops doing good to his people (*Jeremiah 32:40*).

So, it is the clarity of knowing that our help is in God and 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 also clarity of personally knowing "*the Maker of heaven and earth*" (verse 8).

We've probably all made a few things – with varying degrees of success. Right? If you were very successful, you could even make a *YouTube* video about it. And people might even gain some success in following you because they trust in your expertise

and helpfulness. But how about this? We are being helped by the *Maker of Heaven and Earth*! That's better than any *YouTube* video I've ever seen!

How does all that make you feel? You, like David, can also be very clear about your praises and your assurances. Not vague or fuzzy or generic. Your assurance comes from the fact that you have someone on your side. And that someone is none other than the Maker of heaven and earth. How about that? And so your praises are not just songs that you can sing without thought or meaning. It is the praise about the one who would not let anyone or anything destroy you. That's clarity about our praises and our assurances. If that clarity is not there yet, don't give up until you have it. Reading and meditating on the truths found in this psalm can help you get there.

Conclusion: I would encourage you to read this psalm as often as you can, letting every word of it sink into your heart. Spend some time meditating, praying, writing, and talking to others about your convictions.

In conclusion I have two questions for you:

- 1) Is it clear to you that the *Maker of Heaven and Earth* is your helper? He is on your side and will not let difficulties totally destroy you.
- 2) Are you praising him clearly and specifically for who he is and what he has done? Praising him to others and praising him to his face.

Finally, I have one suggestion. (Sorry, as a retired teacher, I still like to give homework assignments!) I would recommend that you write your own praise to the *Maker of Heaven and Earth*. Write down your convictions about what your life would be if God had not been on your side. Then share that with others. (Send it to me too. I would love to read it.)

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