

Psalm 116 – Study Guide¹

**Psalm 116 is a Psalm of Thanksgiving rooted in the making of a vow
secured in prayerful petition and blossoming in worshipful thanksgiving before all.**

As people we love stories... we especially love other people's stories as they give a narrative to the shared experiences of life and the elements of life that are sometimes only common to a few. Psalm 116 is someone's story and it is a story that we can grow from and that will benefit our souls. This is a story of hardship, prayer, deliverance, and worshipful thanksgiving in response to being heard and answered by The LORD. While its elements are not necessarily every man's elements they are still universal in their principles and application. The problem that we frequently have when applying these principles is not with its truth failing in our own precise contexts, but the problem is that of one's vantage point. When struggles are endured we must learn to follow the example of this psalmist, to cry out with confidence and with the full expectation that you too will finish your story with testimony of the actions of worshipful thanksgiving and that you too will engage in response to the Lord's magnificent deliverances and help. Finally, I would encourage you to embrace the worshipful joy of Psalm 116 through the perspective of our greater gain:

"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Structure and Outlines

David Crowe

116:1-2	Testimony of the delivered and worshipful psalmist.
116:3-4	Testimony of deliverance from death.
116:5-6	Testimony of the Deliverer.
116:7	Testimony of rest.
116:8-9	Testimony of The LORD's bountiful dealings.
116:10-11	Testimony of belief under duress.
116:12-14	Testimony of worshipful gratitude.
116:15-16	Testimony of relationship.
116:17-19	Testimony of worshipful gratitude.

John MacArthur²

- I. The Lord's Response to the Psalmist's Prayer for Deliverance from Death (116:1-11)
- II. The Psalmist's Reaction to God's Deliverance of him from Death (116:12-19)

ESV Study Bible³

116:1-4	I Love the Lord, Who Has Heard My Prayer
116:5-7	The Lord Deals Bountifully with His Own
116:8-11	You Delivered My Soul from Death
116:12-19	How Shall I Show My Thanks to Him?

¹ Prepared by David Crowe for Pray's Mill Baptist Church Adult Sunday School

ALL Scripture Quotations are from the ESV Bible unless the Scripture reference is in a quote from another author – their original translation was kept.

² The MacArthur Study Bible, NKJV. Word Bibles, 1997. (Hereafter: MacArthur), Pg. 847

³ English Standard Version Study Bible. Crossway Bibles, 2008. (Hereafter: ESV SB) Pgs. 1089-1090

Arnold Rhodes⁴

116:1-11 The Reason for the Psalmist's Thanksgiving
116:12-19 The Psalmist's Payment of His Vows

Willem VanGemen⁵

I.
A Thanksgiving (vv.1-2)
 B The Need for Deliverance (v.3)
 C God the Deliverer (vv.4-6a)
II.
A' Thanksgiving (vv.6b-7)
 C' God the Deliverer (vv.8-11)
 B' Vows of Thanksgiving (vv.12-14)
III.
 B'' Vows of Thanksgiving (vv.13-14)
 C'' God the Deliverer (vv.15-16)
A'' Vows of Thanksgiving (vv.17-19)

Keil & Delitzsch⁶

116:1-4
116:5-9
116:10-14
116:15-19

James Boice⁷

116:1-9 What God did for the Psalmist.
116:10-19 What the writer will do.

Steven Lawson⁸

116:1-4 The Psalmist's Supplication.
116:5-9 The Psalmist's Salvation.
116:10-14 The Psalmist's Surrender.
116:15-19 The Psalmist's Sacrifice.

Derek Kidner⁹

116:1-4 Remembered Anguish.
116:5-11 Remembered Mercy.
116:12-19 Fervent Gratitude.

⁴ The Layman's Bible Commentary: Psalms, Volume 9. Arnold B. Rhodes. John Knox Press, 1966 (Hereafter: Rhodes), Pg. 160

⁵ The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition: Psalms, Volume 5. Willem A. VanGemen. Zondervan, 2008 (Hereafter: VanGemen), Pg. 844

⁶ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; Keil & Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 5 – Psalms. Hendrickson Publishers, 2001. (Hereafter: Keil & Delitzsch), Pgs. 714-715

⁷ An Expository Commentary: Psalms, Volume 2. James Montgomery Boice. Baker Books, 1996 (Hereafter: Boice), Pgs. 942,946

⁸ Holman Old Testament Commentary: Psalms 76-150, Volume 12. Steven J. Lawson. B&H Publishing Group, 2006 (Hereafter: Lawson), Pgs. 220-221

⁹ Derek Kidner; Kidner Classic Commentaries: Psalms 73-150. IVP Academic (Digital Copy), 2008. (Hereafter: Kidner), Pgs. 442-445

116:1-2	Thanksgiving.
116:3-6a	God the Deliverer.
116:6b-7	Thanksgiving.
116:8-11	God the Deliverer.
116:12-14	Vows of Thanksgiving.
116:15-16	God the Deliverer.
116:17-19	Vows of Thanksgiving.

Header

Psalms 116 does not have a Header, consequently it does not contain personally identifying information regarding the psalm's author or the nature of his immediate context. What is plain throughout the psalm is that the psalmist has endured a substantial hardship and was either near the point of death or was speaking metaphorically in the strongest possible terms regarding some other struggle. Finally, whatever the nature of the struggle we see that the psalmist is magnificently delivered and responds with worshipful thanksgiving and testimony before all.

116:1-2 Testimony of the delivered and worshipful psalmist.

The first two verses of Psalm 116 provide a thesis like statement for the whole of the psalm. The psalmist begins by declaring his love for The LORD because (or for this very reason) The LORD heard his prayers, gave ear to his petitions, and took notice of his voice as he beseeched him and as he made pleas for mercy. The psalmist continues beyond his declaration of love for The LORD and states that because The LORD was pleased to hear him, to incline his ear to him, he will therefore call on him for the remainder of his days.

This unit starts off as referenced with the psalmist declaring his love for The LORD, and it is a striking statement in its own right. The psalmist is effectively declaring that his personal affection for The LORD is rooted in the truth that he beseeches the God who is pleased to hear and answer prayer.

"I love The LORD..." *Because he heard my voice. Because he heard my pleas for mercy.*

The psalmist would find it rather perplexing that one who declares their love for The LORD would live a life deficient if not devoid of prayer. Likely he would wonder if one understands the God he knows... who hears his voice, his pleas, and who inclines his ears toward the one who beseeches him. It is quite possible that he would call what is referenced as a cluttered or overly occupied life idolatry... perhaps passive idolatry. But he would likely be confused why it would not be idolatry when something other than God has secured one's hopes, needs, satisfaction, delights, and has assuaged their need for help. Maybe not, but it would be rather perplexing... and it is... is it not?

The psalmist loves The LORD who hears and answers prayer... what say you?

The psalmist's declaration appears to be unique in another way too. Loving The LORD is a critical element and truth that resides within all faithful men and women, but such an overt expression of it was unique.

To love The LORD was not an elective element of the believing community and was clearly codified in The Law:

Deuteronomy 6:5	"You shall love The LORD your God...."
Deuteronomy 10:12	"And now, Israel, <i>what does the LORD your God require of you</i> , but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, <i>to love him</i> ..."
Deuteronomy 11:1	"You shall therefore love the LORD your God...."
Deuteronomy 11:13	"And if you will indeed obey my commandments that <i>I command you today</i> , to love the LORD your God...."
Deuteronomy 11:22	"For if you will be careful to do all this commandment that <i>I command you to do</i> , loving the LORD your God...."

¹⁰ Awake O Harp: A Devotional Commentary on the Psalms. William Varner. Kress Biblical Resources, 2011. (Hereafter: Varner), Pg. 294

Deuteronomy 13:3 "For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you *love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*"

Deuteronomy 30:6 "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, *so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul*, that you may live."

The theme of loving The LORD continued throughout the Old Testament Scriptures too:

Joshua 22:5 "Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD *commanded you, to love the LORD your God....*"

Joshua 23:11 "Be very careful, therefore, to *love the LORD your God.* "

1 Kings 3:3 "*Solomon loved the LORD*, walking in the statutes of David his father...."

Psalms 18:1 "*I love you, O LORD*, my strength." A psalm of David when he was delivered from the hand of Saul.

Psalms 31:23 "*Love the LORD*, all you his saints!" A psalm of David.

The matter of loving The LORD is clearly commanded and understood to be a natural and even chief element in one's relationship with The LORD, but it is not frequently stated in such a direct and overt manner as it is in Psalm 18 and here in Psalm 116. Even in the New Testament it is not so overtly stated that one personally loves the Lord until Peter's very intense and intimate restoration in John 21 where he is repeatedly asked and answers that he does indeed love the Lord.

The reference to the psalmist's "pleas for mercy" makes it unambiguously clear that this is prayer. Note like examples:

2 Chronicles 6:21 The text frames "pleas" in such a manner as to make it synonymous with prayer and it is requested that The LORD would hear the pleas of his people and respond.

Psalms 28 The psalm is framed with two references to "pleas for mercy" - in 28:2 David is requesting that his pleas for mercy be heard by The LORD and at the end of the psalm in 28:6 he begins giving exuberant praise to The LORD "For he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy." He then finishes the psalm with thanksgiving and praise to God, not unlike what is prescribed in Psalm 116.

Psalms 31:22 David testifies that The LORD "heard the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cried to you for help."

Psalms 86:6 David is requesting that The LORD would hear his plea for grace.

Daniel 9:3 Daniel offers a truth rich repentant prayer on behalf of Israel and in such he pleads for mercy.

The psalmist goes on to state that he will fill his days in petitioning The LORD because The LORD was pleased to hear him. His response to being heard was not momentary gratitude, but a resolution to wholly give himself to a life of continued petition. This establishes a strong theme of the psalm as a whole: I called on the The LORD, he has heard, therefore I will call on his name (116:4), I will call on his name (116:13), I will call on his name (116:17).

In 116:4 the psalmist testifies to having called on the name of The LORD (his plea for mercy as articulated in the request that his soul be delivered).

In 116:13 the psalmist testifies that he will call on the name of The LORD in response to The LORD's salvation.

In 116:17 the psalmist testifies that he will call on the name of The LORD in response to The LORD's deliverance.

116:3-4 Testimony of deliverance from death.

Transitioning from the thesis like core of Psalm 116 the psalmist begins a pattern of more precise testimonies that continue through the remainder of the psalm, but all of which are captured in summary form with his opening affection, gratitude, and testimony of praying and being heard.

The psalmist now articulates why he cried out to The LORD and the context in which he speaks in 116:1-2 where his pleas for mercy were heard and when The LORD inclined his ear to him. He was in great distress and anguish and he expresses this in the most severe of ways:

Snares of death encompassed him.

Pangs of Sheol laid hold of him.

This is severe language, but its details are not known. We have to be content that we do not know if this a great sickness, military oppression, betrayal or other number of grave struggles. However, we can weigh the language the psalmist has provided.

He speaks of being snared by death – like a trapper catching its prey. Cords or ropes snatching one to an unwillful submission. These snares have encompassed, surrounded, consumed him.

He speaks of the pangs of Sheol laying hold of him. Sheol being a reference to the grave or the abode of the dead. "In Old Testament poetry death and Sheol are aggressive, clutching at the living to waste them with sickness or crush them with despondency...."¹¹

Sheol has laid hold of him or has confronted him.

Then as by way of summary of these nightmarish images he simply states that he suffered or was confronted with distress/trouble/adversity and anguish/sorrow/grief.

So how does the psalmist respond to these terrible circumstances... he responds in a way that should instruct your soul. The psalmist states, "Then I called on the name of The LORD." 116:4

He responded by crying out to God (116:4) and maintaining faith (116:10). His soul was not wrecked in this hour of trouble, but it was sent fleeing to its refuge.

Now, in the providence of God in the securing of the Scriptures we are provided a most precise detail in a psalm that provides so few, the psalmist's prayer: "O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!" 116:4

In the midst of the threats of death and Sheol and among his distress and anguish he calls on the name of The LORD.

It appears that the psalmist calls upon the name of The LORD by simply calling out to him personally and by name. It is a very simple and brief cry out, but its request is not ambiguous - he needs deliverance, he cannot self-rescue so he calls to him who is able. Further, the psalmist states that it was his soul that needed deliverance which appears to fit in with the threats of death and Sheol, and his response of his great need is to call out the giver of life and the Lord over the grave.

116:5-6 Testimony of the Deliverer.

Before continuing a treatment of the details of his deliverance the psalmist addresses the character qualities of The LORD, his Deliverer. The psalmist first identifies The LORD as gracious (giving undeserved charity, underserved kindness, undeserved restoration and help). The psalmist identifies The LORD as righteous (perfectly just, absolutely right, pure, and holy in one's conduct and actions). The psalmist then uses the psalm's first plural reference - identifying The LORD as "our God" indicating that he is providing corporate testimony on some level of his deliverance. The psalmist then goes on to state that The LORD is merciful (not dealing with one in the manner that they deserve - in a way this is a fruit of compassion).

Following this, 116:6,7 demonstrate these character qualities as applied to the psalmist's experience.

Gracious or compassionate.

At the 2016 Ekklesia Conference Rick Holland spoke on the magnificent medium of language and words that The LORD has given to his people, and the chief example he provided was when Moses asked to see God's glory and he was not permitted to see anything, save its afterglow. However, what Moses was permitted to embrace was *God's glory expressed in words*.¹² It is this very context of The LORD's glory revealed in words that directs our attention to a bulwark of the revelation of the character of God most clearly expressed in Exodus 34 and again making itself known here in Psalm 116.

¹¹ Kidner, Pg. 443

¹² Dr. Rick Holland, Ekklesia Conference: Session 3, Jupiter FL, 09-17-2016

Exodus 34:6-7 "The LORD, The LORD, a God merciful and *gracious*, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." Exodus 34:6-7

As would be expected, because this is a magnificent character quality of God it is frequently testified to and developed throughout the Scriptures. The following are a sampling of this quality on display and coupled with other well established character qualities that ever so generously bless The LORD's people:

Exodus 22:27	"...I am <i>compassionate</i> ."
2 Chronicles 30:9	"...The LORD your God is <i>gracious</i> and merciful...."
Nehemiah 9:17	"But you are a God ready to forgive, <i>gracious</i> and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them."
Nehemiah 9:31	"...for you are a <i>gracious</i> and merciful God."
Psalms 86:15	"But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and <i>gracious</i> , slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."
Psalms 103:8	"The LORD is merciful and <i>gracious</i> , slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."
Psalms 111:4	"...The LORD is <i>gracious</i> and merciful."
Psalms 116:5	" <i>Gracious</i> is The LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful."
Psalms 145:8	"The LORD is <i>gracious</i> and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."
Joel 2:13	"...rend your hearts and not your garments.' Return to The LORD your God, for he is <i>gracious</i> and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love...."

Mercy or compassion is a close companion that is frequently expressed throughout the Scriptures. The majority of references to this mercy appear to be used in restorative passages where The LORD is extending mercy to his people in their restoration after he has judged them for their vulgar disobedience and unfaithfulness.

Psalms 103:13	"As a father shows <i>compassion/mercy</i> to this children, so The LORD shows <i>compassion/mercy</i> to those who fear him."
Psalms 116:5	"Gracious is The LORD, and righteous; our God is <i>merciful/compassionate</i> ."
Isaiah 30:18	"Therefore The LORD waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show <i>mercy</i> to you. For The LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him."

William Varner provides a concise overview of these three highlighted character elements of The LORD stating, "[The psalmist] is fully aware that the Lord is 'gracious' in his forgiveness, 'righteous' in keeping the covenant, and 'full of compassion' in his understanding of the limits of his children."¹³

What should be so very clear is that the crying out, the calling, the petitioning in prayer is rooted in the character of God. It is The LORD's character qualities and attributes that carry the weight of the prayer. It is only for the one praying to recognize these things accurately to be properly humbled, put in their rightful place of submission and gratitude. Therefore, it was knowing his God that drove the psalmist to pray to his God in his great distress in his time of terrible need - confident of his deliverance. Further, it was in proper recognition of his deliverance that he continues to respond: in calling out to The LORD, in worshipful thanksgiving, in paying vows, and in public declarations to the excellencies and kindness of his God, our God. It is at best fundamentally a theological deficiency on our parts when we do not pray and at worst a soft indulgence in idolatry because something is being depended upon and frequently The LORD is being artificially blamed... some god occupies the throne of the heart in these offenses and it is the wrong one.

Prayer is shaped by theology as are its deficiencies and absence. One prays *because they believe*, one prays *what they believe*, and one remains silent *because they do not believe*.

Not unrelated to the previous references to the character qualities of God the psalmist notes that The LORD preserves the simple and this is a compassionate kindness which the psalmist personally feels the residuals blessing from too.

¹³ Varner, Pg. 294

While not necessarily himself simple, the simple are those who do not appear to have the same level of common understanding as others and are in need of greater assistance. Perhaps more telling is Derek Kidner's observation of the simple: "The simple is a revealing description to use, for in the Old Testament it has no trace of merit."¹⁴ Even so... The LORD preserves the simple and when the psalmist himself was brought low The LORD was pleased to deliver him, to save him.

116:7 Testimony of rest.

It appears that the psalmist's soul was in a state of restlessness, but it has found its rest again in The LORD. The psalmist has been restored to a disposition of peace as the prayer for the deliverance of his soul 116:4 has been fully realized and he can now return to a place of rest.

The psalmist also provides the reason or means that his soul can return to its rest: The LORD has dealt bountifully with him. A bountiful response rooted in the expressed character qualities of The LORD who has delivered with graciousness, with righteousness, and with mercy.

Note the tenderness of the psalmist's rest: he has been dealt with bountifully by The LORD and this will be made especially clear in 116:8 where he testifies that he was rescued from death, from tears, and from stumbling.

116:8-9 Testimony of The LORD's bountiful dealings.

Again addressing the deliverance of his soul as expressed in 116:4 and its salvation 116:6 the psalmist states "for" or "because" and this appears to be looking to that which is following: deliverance looks to walking before The LORD in the land of living.

The comprehensive deliverance that the psalmist experienced: ultimately soul or life from death, eyes from crying, feet from stumbling, resulted in not just walking in the land of the living, but walking before The LORD in the land of the living. The land of the living being the abode of those who enjoy the Lord's kind gift of natural life (the physical realm of creation). This is in clear contrast to the snares of death and pangs of Sheol.

The phrase "walk before" has a component of serving, of walking in obedience before The LORD.¹⁵

116:10-11 Testimony of belief under duress.

Once again, in a psalm whose stylistic emphasis is more abstract and poetic than precise in yielding historical context and details we are provided some of the psalmist's words as spoken to The LORD in prayer.

"I am greatly afflicted."

"All mankind are liars."

Note however that these were not words expressed from an uninformed soul, but one that knew truth and submitted to it in confident belief, in faith. The psalmist testified that he believed when he spoke.

John MacArthur states, "Faith in God and His ability to deliver preceded the psalmist's prayer for deliverance."¹⁶

I wholly concur that this belief was the root of the psalmist being able to cry out to The LORD. Further, he is testifying to being heard, not to discovering that there was one that actually hears, whoever that might be. He knew The LORD; therefore, he cried out to him.

¹⁴ Kidner, Pg. 443

¹⁵ The NET Bible, Translation Note: Psalm 116 (Note 15), accessed at lumina.bible.org/bible

¹⁶ MacArthur, Pg.848

Again take note of the testified context, it was one of great distress and affliction and while it is possible that verbally affirming these things might be misconstrued as unbelief it was rather deep rooted belief that allowed the psalmist to acknowledge their presence and their demise as he cried to his Deliverer.

Even under great affliction and formally acknowledging such he is not failing to believe truth and the God of truth.

Regarding the psalmist's second statement here we do not have sufficient information to know the nature of his alarm, but that in this condition he continued to believe and saw clearly that confidence does not belong in man who fails to speak truth, but in the God of truth. The psalmist recognizes and affirms that men speak lies, but he does not allow the indulgence in mistruth by others to pervert his own affirmation and commitment to actual truth.

2 Corinthians 4:13 in part cites 116:10.

"Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, '*I believed, and so I spoke,*' we also believe, and so we also speak...."

Romans 3:4 in part cites 116:11.

"Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, 'That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.'"

116:12-14 Testimony of worshipful gratitude.

The psalmist poses a question affirming that he understands that The LORD has indeed dealt bountifully with his soul 116:7 and now wants to ascertain what the proper response of such wonderful things should be, recognizing that there is no repayment, but a response is certainly in order.

There are proper things to yield to The LORD in response to his magnificent works and kind deliverance. The first recording of a like activity was Noah making burnt offerings to The LORD after being delivered through the worldwide judgment of the flood. There is no overt indication that he was made to perform this sacrifice, but rather it appears wholly consistent that a righteous man would take like action in gratitude to God and so the pattern would and does continue. Responses to The LORD's bountiful work were even institutionalized elements within the sacrificial system, namely to yield various offerings of thanksgiving, of affirmation of The LORD's magnificent works, and in fulfillment of oaths.

These principles carry over to the New Covenant believer as well, who is exhorted, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

The psalmist goes on to state exactly what he will now do:

He will lift up the cup of salvation, 116:13.

He will call on the name of The LORD, 116:13.

He will pay his vows to The LORD in the presence of all The LORD's people, 116:14.

Regarding this first action, lifting or receiving the cup of salvation, various commentators have referenced the "cup of salvation" as a drink offering associated with the thanksgiving offering made in response to the psalmist's vow. However, all such references appear to be general conclusions from the presence of drink offerings in the sacrificial system and the reference to a cup here in the text. From my observations there did not appear to be a clear connection between the two in this text and I therefore have not pursued this conclusion for resolution. However, this cup does appear to draw from other "cup language" – namely that this "cup of salvation" appears to be a direct contrast to the references to great judgment and the "cup of God's wrath," which the guilty will be made to drink. This is a cup of salvation and provides the image of deliverance and rescue. Salvation being a magnificent deliverance, a rescuing from danger, hardship, or even enemies in battle

Derek Kidner comes to a like conclusion and expounds on its broader ramifications and beauty.

"I will take in my hands the cup of salvation ...". (This cup could refer to the drink-offering, as TEV conjectures; cf. Num. 15:10. But as a cup of salvation it suggests God's gift to man, like that of Ps. 23:5, rather than man's to God.) As the opposite of the 'foaming cup' of wrath which we deserve (cf. 75:8), and as something freely offered, it displays the very pattern of the gospel. Man is the suppliant (cf. 13b with verses 1,2) and the recipient, before he has anything to give his only gifts are debts of gratitude (14)."¹⁷

In conjunction with the lifting up the cup of salvation the psalmist is also calling on the name of The LORD, an action that is exercised in both struggle and praise as such is the nature of prayer.

The psalmist also affirms that he will honor his vows to The LORD. It appears that in his time of need he made vows to The LORD and now that he has been delivered he will be honoring the said vows. These appear to be the elective vows that persons made and upon their being answered sacrifices were then carried out, thereby affirming their answer and blessing others. The psalmist is providing testimony to The LORD's magnificent salvation and the people are in turn bearing testimony of his affirming these things - the ever expanding dynamic of a witness bearing people constituted by witness bearing individuals.

Vow Offerings

Paying vows (in conjunction with vow offerings) - an elective commitment to bind oneself to when petitioning The LORD for help or favor and upon this petition being answered an offering was made.

Leviticus 7:16	Instructions regarding a vow offering.
Leviticus 22:17-25	Instructions regarding various offerings, including vow offerings.
Leviticus 27	Further instructions regarding valuations for items submitted in the honoring of vows.
Numbers 15:1-10	Instructions regarding various offerings, including vow offerings.
Numbers 21:1-3	A corporate/national example of taking a vow and then yielding the vowed item to The LORD - in this case cities were defeated and the fulfilled vow was their destruction.
Numbers 30	Special instructions on the binding nature of vows and the role that headship plays.
Deuteronomy 12	Instructions regarding various offerings, including vow offerings.

116:15-16 Testimony of relationship.

"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints." 116:15

It seems a bit counter intuitive to have this statement here in light of the prior request for the psalmist to have his soul delivered in 116:4 and the testimony of his soul being delivered from death in 116:8.

Further, it is an interesting statement because the Old Testament does not esteem death so much as it does the blessing(s) of life.

Then there is the tension with statements made in Ezekiel regarding how The LORD valued death:

Ezekiel 18:32 "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live."

Ezekiel 33:11 "...I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked...."

Precious, rare, or costly in the sight of The LORD is the death of his saints, godly ones, or holy ones.

VanGemenen understands this statement to be communicating the great love The LORD has for his people and that he "does not lightly permit adversity... or an early death...."¹⁸

Keil & Delitzsch state, "The death of His saints is no trifling matter with God; He does not lightly suffer it to come about; He does not suffer His own to be torn away from Him by death."¹⁹

¹⁷ Kidner, Pg. 445

¹⁸ VanGemenen, Pg. 849

¹⁹ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg. 716

Steven Lawson also comes to a like conclusion when he too states, “Precious are all the saints to the Lord. Even when they are near death, it is not as if God no longer cares for them. They are highly valued by God, especially in death. God cares intensely about his saints in their darkest hour. Either in a saint’s death or by his deliverance, God would be glorified.”²⁰

Continuing with the relational elements, the psalmist affirms that he is The LORD’s servant and then restates it and further qualifies that he is his servant and the son of his maidservant. In so identifying himself as The LORD’s servant, the psalmist is stating that he is one who is subject to his Lord’s rule, desire, and command.

However, the second and more precise identification as the son of The LORD’s maidservant proves more challenging. What appears to be the more popular conclusion is that the psalmist is communicating that he was “born within the household of faith.”²¹ A conclusion that Keil & Delitzsch agree with stating that it would be a reference to the psalmist’s “pious mother.”²²

The other conclusion regarding this stated relationship of the psalmist appears to have more contextual support and sees the reference to the relationship as a statement not of actual relationship (as he is also not necessarily fulfilling any traditional servant like roles directly to The LORD), but an articulation or statement of humility.

The reason that this would be an articulation of humility was that a maidservant was often a “secondary wife” or concubine and identifying himself as the maidservant’s son would be expressing a measure of a lowlier status, one of humility.²³ So the psalmist has affirmed with a clear emphasis that he is The LORD’s servant (stating it twice in a row) and then he qualifies further that he is son of The LORD’s maidservant. He is The LORD’s humble and thankful servant – joyfully recognizing his privileged relationship to the Redeemer who hears and saves.

116:17-19 Testimony of worshipful gratitude.

The final section of this psalm that has placed a high and joyful premium on calling out to The LORD in prayer, being heard, being delivered, and responding in worshipful thanksgiving has seemingly returned its core themes as expressed in 116:13-14 and developed them further.

First note that the parallels with 116:13-14 are quite clear.

116:13 Lifting up the cup of salvation. / 116:17 Offering the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

116:13 Calling on the name of The LORD. / 116:17 Calling on the name of The LORD.

116:14 Paying his vows to The LORD in the presence of the people. / 116:18 Paying his vows to The LORD in the presence of the people.

Even with the clear duplications within the parallels it appears that the one minor change between them is quite instructive: an emphasis on salvation (116:13) gives way to thanksgiving (116:17). This shift from salvation to thanksgiving is effectively the thrust of the psalm. The psalmist has been delivered and he responds with worshipful thanksgiving that is accompanied by calling on the name of The LORD, paying vows, and publicly testifying to God’s bountiful goodness toward him.

Derek Kidner notes that the difference is one of: taking (the cup) to offering (the sacrifice).²⁴

Next, following this transition that appears to capture the flow of the psalm the psalmist again affirms that he will call on the name of The LORD.

²⁰ Lawson, Pg. 221

²¹ VanGemeren, Pg. 849

²² Keil & Delitzsch, Pg. 717

²³ The NET Bible, Translation Note: Psalm 116 (Note 20), accessed at lumina.bible.org/bible

²⁴ Kidner, Pg. 446

The psalmist then again references the third element of the fulfilling of his vows as his cries and prayers have been heard and answered. Here though he more precisely affirms that these sacrifices of thanksgiving will be fulfilled in the house of The LORD, the place where God has been pleased to identify with his people in worship and prayer. The place where others would be securing their own vows in full anticipation of being heard and who would now witness the joyful conclusion and testimony that the psalmist could offer of himself being heard and magnificently delivered.

The psalmist testifies to those present in the fulfilling of his vow and he has testified to us in the securing of his testimony in the Scriptures here in Psalm 116. He has so clearly stated:

“I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.” 116:1-2

The psalmist called on the name of The LORD and was heard. His testimony now consists not only of experience, but of action:

116:2 “I will call on him as long as I live.”

116:9 “I will walk before The LORD in the land of the living.”

116:13 “I will lift up the cup of salvation.”

116:13 “I will call on the name of The LORD.”

116:14 “I will pay my vows to The LORD.”

116:17 “I will offer to The LORD the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

116:17 “I will call on the name of The LORD.”

116:18 “I will pay my vows.”

What say you?

Will your theology drive you to prayer? Will your theology shape your prayer properly? Will you respond to The LORD who hears and answers with worshipful thanksgiving and testimony to others? Will you be able to join the psalmist in stating, “I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.” 116:1-2

Conclusion to Psalm 116

Hallelujah!

Praise The LORD!