

Psalm 118 – Study Guide¹

Psalm 118 is a Psalm of Thanksgiving rooted in testimony of The LORD's everlasting steadfast or covenant love, which has expressed itself here in The LORD's faithfully hearing and delivering his beloved. The psalm itself is framed in Temple liturgy and moves from personal deliverance to corporate worship.

Structure and Outlines

While using poetic redundancy and thematic overlap, Psalm 118 still manages to pack a tremendous range of elements into its moderate twenty-nine verses. Some have elected to treat the parts in sweeping wholes, whereas I have elected to draw out the developed elements throughout. Further, I am persuaded that 118:5 and 118:21 serve as thesis like elements of the psalm as a whole from which all the details work themselves out. The psalmist unpacks through the breadth of the psalm that *he cried out*, that *he was answered*, and that *he was saved* – all truths rooted in his opening and closing liturgical call that The LORD is good and his steadfast love endures forever.

David Crowe

118:1-4	Call to worship The LORD.
118:5	<i>The immediate core context/catalyst of the psalm.</i>
118:6-7	Trusting in The LORD.
118:8-9	Taking refuge in The LORD.
118:10-13	Victory in The LORD.
118:14-16	Song of salvation.
118:17-20	Live to declare.
118:21	<i>The immediate core context/catalyst of the psalm.</i>
118:22-28	The rejected cornerstone.
118:29	Closing call to worship The LORD.

John MacArthur²

118:1-4	Call to Worship
118:5-21	Personal Praise
118:22-24	Corporate Worship
118:25-29	Commitment to Worship

ESV Study Bible³

118:1-4	Let Everyone Give Thanks to the Lord.
118:5-7	I Called, and He Answered.
118:8-9	The Lord Is a Sure Refuge.
118:10-13	The Gentiles Surrounded Me, and the Lord Delivered Me.
118:14-16	We Sing Glad Songs of Salvation.
118:17-18	Though the Lord Disciplines Me, I Will Not Die.
118:19-27	Let Me Enter the Gate of the Lord's House.
118:28-29	I Will Give You Thanks and Praise.

Willem VanGemen⁴

- A Call to Communal Thanksgiving (vv.1-4)
- B Thanksgiving (vv.5-21)
- A' Thanksgiving Liturgy (vv.22-29)

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. 849

³ English Standard Version Study Bible. Crossway Bibles, 2008. (Hereafter: ESV SB) Pgs. 1091-1093

⁴ The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition: Psalms, Volume 5. Willem A. VanGemen. Zondervan, 2008 (Hereafter: VanGemen), Pg. 851

Keil & Delitzsch⁵

118:1-18

118:19-29

While providing a very simple division in their introductory comments on the psalm, a slightly modified breakdown is provided where 118:1-19 is concluded to be the song of the festive procession coming to the Temple and 118:20-27 is concluded to be the song sung by the Levites receiving the said procession and animals for sacrifice. They finish with 118:28 being an answer to those who have arrived for worship and 118:29 serving as the conclusion of the song.⁶

Arnold Rhodes⁷

118:1-4 Call to Thanksgiving

118:5-21 Thanksgiving in the First Person

118:22-29 Praise in the Inner Court

Steven Lawson⁸

118:1-4 A Call to Thankfulness

118:5-9 A Call to Trust

118:10-14 A Call to Triumph

118:15-18 A Call to Testify

118:19-21 A Call to Transcendence

118:22-27 A Call to Truth

118:28-29 A Call to Thankfulness

William Varner⁹

118:1-4 All are bidden to praise Yahweh for His *hesed*.¹⁰

118:5-9 He is the deliverer and strength of His people.

118:10-14 Nations have plotted against Israel in vain.

118:15-18 Public thanksgiving renews their national life.

118:19-24 Worshippers approach the Temple with praise.

118:25-29 Hosannas and blessings consummate the worship.

Derek Kidner¹¹

118:1-4 Timeless love

118:5-9 Timely help

118:10-14 The ring of foes

118:15-18 The songs of victory

118:19-27 A victor's welcome

118:28-29 Doxology

Background and Context

The English Standard Version Study Bible states, "The psalm describes a festive procession into Jerusalem after some great deliverance."¹² They go on to argue that while the exact context is not known it is worthy to consider that the psalm may have been composed for a specific occasion and they cite the rebuilding of the Temple in the book of Ezra. The psalm in this context would be a personal, but general affirmation of deliverance and care by The LORD.¹³

⁵ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; Keil & Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 5 – Psalms. Hendrickson Publishers, 2001. (Hereafter: Keil & Delitzsch), Pgs. 721-723

⁶ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg. 721

⁷ The Layman's Bible Commentary: Psalms, Volume 9. Arnold B. Rhodes. John Knox Press, 1966 (Hereafter: Rhodes), Pgs. 161-162

⁸ Holman Old Testament Commentary: Psalms 76-150, Volume 12. Steven J. Lawson. B&H Publishing Group, 2006 (Hereafter: Lawson), Pgs. 228-231

⁹ Awake O Harp: A Devotional Commentary on the Psalms. William Varner. Kress Biblical Resources, 2011. (Hereafter: Varner), Pg. 298

¹⁰ *Hesed* is the English transliteration of the word in the original Hebrew text and it means covenant/steadfast love.

¹¹ Derek Kidner; Kidner Classic Commentaries: Psalms 73-150. IVP Academic (Digital Copy), 2008. (Hereafter: Kidner), Pgs. 448-451

¹² ESV SB, Pg. 1091

¹³ ESV SB, Pg. 1091

Keil & Delitzsch also argue for the time of Ezra and the establishment of the second Temple. Arguing that the struggles surrounding this context and others of this time as articulated by Nehemiah coincide with the narrative of struggle and deliverance.

James Boice states, "There are good reasons for thinking that this psalm was used for praise by the congregation of Israel on festive processional occasions. The repetitive language alone suggests this, as well as the progression of ideas from anguish (v.5) to worship at God's altar (v.27). The psalm even contains the words 'festal procession' (v.27)." ¹⁴

Derek Kidner similarly concludes that this is a liturgical procession to the place of worship. "Many voices are heard: liturgical (1-4), personal (5-14), popular (15f.); and there are fragments of formal dialogue as the central figure and his procession approach the gates, demand admission (19), and are answered and acclaimed (20, 26), finally to end their pilgrimage at the altar (27)." ¹⁵

William Varner strikes a careful balance about drawing too firm a conclusion on these matter and tempers the elements of good evidence with what can and cannot be known. "Many ideas abound about the specific occasion when the psalm was sung. The fact that we can't really know the occasion for certain makes it appropriate that we recite it on any occasion when our hearts are full of praise and thanksgiving for the abundant acts of God on our behalf. Gratitude follows grace like thunder follows lightening." ¹⁶

However, in fairness to his full position on this matter Varner makes a very precise case for Psalm 118's intensive use during Jesus' passion week.

118:1-4 Call to worship The LORD.

The whole of the opening section is a call to worship, perhaps even liturgical worship, and it is fully summarized in what the psalmist will repeat four times in the opening verses and once more in closing. In 118:1 there is the initial general call to all to give thanks to The LORD and it has two precise reasons tied to it: *The LORD is good* and *The LORD's steadfast/covenant love endures forever*.

From this comprehensive call in 118:1 the psalmist applies this liturgical refrain to three groups, calling each of them to join in affirming this truth in worshipful thanksgiving. First he calls on Israel who itself is the unique covenant nation of The LORD, a people set apart by promise, and a people whose assurance of endurance is not their own natural capacity, but wholly because The LORD's steadfast/covenant love endures forever. Of all people it is this witness bearing nation of priests that should declare to The LORD, themselves, and all who would hear the testimony of thanksgiving that The LORD's steadfast love endures forever. It is this truth that provides them their very identity, hope, and joy.

The psalmist then calls on the house of Aaron to join in affirming this truth in worshipful thanksgiving. The house of Aaron being members of the Levitical tribe which itself was set apart within the covenant nation and charged with protecting and administering over the affairs of the Tabernacle and Temple. The house of Aaron itself was further distinguished by God's good pleasure to fulfill the highest charges of the Tabernacle and Temple worship by serving as The LORD's priests for Israel. The house of Aaron alone was given charge of the sacrificial and mediation service of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Levi. Theirs was a unique and high calling and it was their persons, clothes, and tools of service that were marked by sacrificial blood. They of all Israel had a special intimate acquaintance of the preciousness of covenant blood and promise. The house of Aaron knew by experience and were ever reminded that The LORD's steadfast love endures forever.

¹⁴ An Expositional Commentary: Psalms, Volume 2. James Montgomery Boice. Baker Books, 1996 (Hereafter: Boice), Pg. 956

¹⁵ Kidner, Pg. 447

¹⁶ Varner, Pg. 298

The final group that the psalmist here calls on to join in affirming this truth in worshipful thanksgiving were those who fear The LORD. Now, it is a reasonable and accurate conclusion that it was all Israel that was called upon to love, obey, and even fear The LORD. However, it appears that this group is being categorically distinguished from Israel in general and the house of Aaron in particular. The most likely identification of these persons would be those who were not of the natural seed of Abraham, but who having witnessed the glorious magnificence of the God of Israel and who having had his truth made plain to them were drawn to him in salvific faith. These were *Gentile converts* or *proselytes* into the Jewish faith and thereby were now made beneficiaries of the steadfast/covenant love of The LORD. These who were so identified as those who fear The LORD would have acute awareness of the fitting nature of declaring to The LORD, to Israel, and all who might hear, that The LORD's steadfast/covenant love endures forever.

Let the Church say, "His steadfast/covenant love endures forever..."

It is perhaps here that the majority of us find ourselves... a people who had our context been of another season in Redemptive History we would hope to have been identified as those who fear The LORD, Gentiles who have become beneficiaries of The LORD's steadfast/covenant love that endures forever. But in The LORD's kindness we are a people who have come after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ and after the establishment of his Church. Therefore, we join in the declaration of The LORD's steadfast/covenant love that endures forever, and we join the psalmist in calling on Israel to participate with us... and until such a time that the covenant people repent we seek to provoke them to jealousy for our great God.

"Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them." Romans 11:13-14

Regarding this repeated refrain, (His steadfast love endures forever), it appears that it was one of liturgy or a formal framing of the public worship that took place in the Temple. Therefore, it would have a communal element to it – the people would be declaring this truth aloud in coming to and participating in worship.

Note the following applications of this liturgical refrain amidst a breadth of contexts and leadership.

1 Chronicles 15-16, when the ark of the covenant of The LORD was brought from the house of Obed-edom to the City of David there was an abundance of worshipful praise and thanksgiving and in this time an element of the call to worship was, "Oh give thanks to The LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever." 1 Chronicles 16:34

This reference in 1 Chronicles 15-16 appears to be the first time that this precise statement is made/recorded and, being that the context is that it was stated when David was king and that he established much of the Temple worship through song and instruments, it very well have been when it was first established as an element in corporate praise and thanksgiving.

2 Chronicles 5:13, when the ark of the covenant of The LORD was placed in the Temple the Levitical singers were accompanied by instruments as they sang, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."

2 Chronicles 7:3, when Solomon completed his prayer of dedication for the Temple, fire came down and consumed the offering and sacrifices and the glory of The LORD filled the Temple. "When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of The LORD on the Temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshipped and gave thanks to The LORD, saying, '*For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.*'"

2 Chronicles 7:6 appears to demonstrate that this statement was a codified element of corporate worship, "for his steadfast love endures forever"

Ezra 3:11, after the exile the Temple was rebuilt and upon the completion of the foundation there was worshipping through song by the priests and Levites, "And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to The LORD, 'For he is good, for steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.'" Again, it appears that this was a codified element of Temple worship.

Psalms 100:5 a brief psalm of thanksgiving that concludes "For The LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations."

Psalms 107:1,8,15,21,31, exhortations for the people to thank The LORD for his steadfast love.

Psalms 136, as a whole abounds in extolling The LORD's enduring steadfast love - opening with three exhortations and closing with another one to give thanks for his enduring steadfast love and then twenty-two times between praising The LORD's enduring steadfast love.

Jeremiah 33:11, in a context of the restoration of Jerusalem and Temple worship the sample of worship provided is voices singing, "Give thanks to The LORD of hosts, for The LORD is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!"

2 Chronicles, an example or possible historical context.

I must concede before making this next argument that neither I nor any of the many resources that I consulted at the conclusion of my study can definitively affirm the historical context of Psalm 118. There are different thoughts on what might have precipitated the writing of the psalm or even how it might have first been used and/or applied. I recognize this and so I offer the following thoughts with the qualification that the historical context is not and cannot be definitively known, but that I personally think that a worthy consideration could be 2 Chronicles 20, and even if it is not the original context it fits the narratively beautifully.

2 Chronicles 20 provides the account of the rule of Jehoshaphat and specifically when Judah was under siege at the time of his rule. Note the following breakdown of the narrative:

20:1, "After this the Moabites and Ammonites, and with them some of the Meunites, came against Jehoshaphat for battle."

20:2-4, upon being made aware of this great threat Jehoshaphat was frightened and he "set his face to seek The LORD" (20:3) and so directed the people of Judah to do the same.

20:5-12, Jehoshaphat led the people in a theologically rich prayer and concludes it with, "O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. *We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.*" (20:12)

20:13-17, after Jehoshaphat's prayer The LORD spoke through Jahaziel and encouraged the people that The LORD would assure their victory stating, "Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God's." (20:15) "You will not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of The LORD on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem." (20:17)

20:18-19, Jehoshaphat and the people responded in humility and with worship.

20:20-23, the next morning Jehoshaphat lead the people into The LORD's battle and the enemies were completely destroyed - ultimately helping destroy one another and Judah's only role was praising The LORD with song, "Given thanks to The LORD, for his steadfast love endures forever." (20:21) Note that this was the same refrain exercised by David and Solomon at pinnacle times of corporate worship as noted above.

20:24-30, after the battle the people retrieved spoil from the battlefield (goods, clothing, and precious things) for three days and on the fourth day they assembled in Valley of Beracah and blessed The LORD after which they returned to Jerusalem with joy "They came to Jerusalem with harps and lyres and trumpets, to the house of the LORD. And the fear of God came on all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard that the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel. So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around." (20:28-30)

118:5 The immediate core context/catalyst of the psalm.

The psalmist has established the liturgical foundation for this psalm of thanks and he now transitions to the elements for which he is giving thanks and begins with a core context or catalyst as it were for the psalm as a whole. He provides four elements here: he was distressed, he called on The LORD, The LORD was pleased to answer him, and The LORD set him free.

The psalmist identifies his role as being in need and making petition and The LORD's role as answering and saving. These are roles that continue to develop through the psalm:

118:6-7	The LORD is on my side.
118:8-9	The LORD is my refuge.
118:10-13	The LORD is my deliverer.
118:14-18	The LORD is my salvation.

118:6-7 Trusting in The LORD.

The psalmist here speaks truth to his own soul and provides an example of what confidence in The LORD looks like for others too. Further, while the psalmist is not likely David, this is the confidence that was demonstrated in the heart of David as he engaged Goliath of Gath in the Valley of Elah. It was not a confidence rooted in oneself, in one's means, in one's army, or in any other natural assistance, but wholly in The LORD.

The psalmist testifies that to have The LORD at one's side leaves no room or place for fear. Darkness would sooner have a place in the noon sun's brightest ray than fear would when The LORD is at one's side. He will not fear. Further, what can he who is but dust and made to be a little lower than the angels do to one under the immediate care of the God of glory? What can man do to me?

Man can do terrible and terrifying things that escape the imagination of the upright, but yet he can do nothing. Man can absolutely do nothing outside of the scope of what The LORD would choose to free him to do and The LORD is toward his beloved as a Savior, as a Rescuer.

The psalmist continues and directly addresses the nature of The LORD being on his side, he is on his side as "his helper." However, this is clearly not a subordinate or demeaning role when it is stated that The LORD is his helper, but rather that The LORD is present as a means of support and strength for the psalmist. Therefore, it is in view of this that the psalmist can testify that he will look in triumph on those who hate him and outside of the covenant community.

These parallel statements are means of great thanks and worshipful praise to God. Who among men can declare such high and unmerited privileges and who can testify to such great care? No one outside of the beneficiaries of the people who enjoy and testify to The LORD's steadfast/covenant love that endures forever.

It is an unimaginable kindness that the Church too knows the confidence of The LORD at her side, freedom from fear and abounding with confidence in her helper.

118:8-9 Taking refuge in The LORD.

The psalmist immediately employs a second set of parallel truths that express the superior advantage of finding one's refuge and safe place for help, protection, and care in The LORD.

This set of parallels of taking refuge in The LORD appear to directly compliment the preceding set of parallel truths addressed above. The psalmist has gone from not fearing man and assuming a posture of triumph to trusting in The LORD over men in general and trusting in The LORD over princes in particular.

In some ways this double affirmation appears almost completely redundant with a slightly greater measure of specificity in the second reference. Further, these refuge references serve to clarify the subordinate role of the psalmist too - it is not that God is on the psalmist's team so much as the psalmist is wholly reliant on The LORD.

What is interesting is that one can to some degree take refuge in man, but it will always be deficient. One can muse over the consistent references of relying on Egypt... and the various national alliances that are temporarily made for seasons by Israel and Judah – attempts at preserving nations from other nations. A quintessential example of this would be

Hezekiah who is taunted with who he might rely on, what nation he might beckon to his aid, and he chooses rather to cast his reliance and that of the nation on The LORD and it was clearly the better choice to trust The LORD as his refuge.

It is clear that just as the psalmist does not fear man 118:6 so neither does he entrust himself to man 118:8, but to The LORD. The psalmist knows that *the act of taking refuge is trusting in the refuge provider* and this to the exclusion of others.

118:10-13 Victory in The LORD.

The psalmist here is increasingly precise regarding the nature of his petition and deliverance. Here he begins a new section/emphasis that, though he was surrounded/encompassed by enemies, he could testify that, "in the name of The LORD I cut them off."

Because the precise historical context is not known it is uncertain if this testimony is to be regarded as literal or metaphorical. However, what is clear is that like incidents were not wholly uncommon for the covenant people who have historically been surrounded by nations who would desire their demise. Further, because the psalmist chose to qualify that it was nations and not just enemies, I am personally persuaded toward literal incidents precipitating this psalm (though it could be a conglomeration of events and not necessarily one singular one – I have shared a possible candidate incident with 2 Chronicles 20 above).

The psalmist testifies to the nations surrounding him that in the name of The LORD he cut them off! He uses the term for circumcision here and it is clear that this was intended to speak to a definitive repulsion of the enemy. However, what he means by "in the name of The LORD" needs to be qualified too as he was not using the name of The LORD as some sort of mystical spell to repel his enemies. Rather, in this context the phrase "in the name of the Lord" means "by the Lord's power."¹⁷

Note the severity of this context as the emphasis on being surrounded is quite heavy here – referenced four times in this section. Two of the said references to being surrounded are in 118:11 where its dual reference provides an emphasis on being surrounded on every side. Then we observe that the already intensified emphasis on his being surrounded increased dramatically more with the using of the image of being surrounded by bees. This image served to provide a picture of a comprehensive and consuming swarming - as full of a surrounding as one can experience.

But then there is another image that is equally potent, a fire among thorns and its emphasis is not on rapid spreading, but on rapid conclusion. Such is the fate of the nations who oppose and enemies who pursue the people of The LORD.

Here we can recall the statement made in 118:5, "Out of my distress I called on The LORD." However, we also can recall at this time the psalmist's statement in 118:7 that The LORD was on his side as his help and he in turn looked upon his enemies triumphantly. Even with this comprehensive surrounding he was still victorious over his enemies by and through The LORD in whose name he has cut his enemies off.

Finally, though abundant in strong language of victory we again see with 118:13 that this was a substantial threat imposed on him by his enemies and that it was not by his own means, but by The LORD's help that he prevailed.

118:14-16 Song of salvation.

The psalmist has now transitioned from the nature of the threat and his deliverance to worshipful testimony and song both of which have The LORD as their object.

¹⁷ The NET Bible, Translation Note: Psalm 118 (Note 13), accessed at lumina.bible.org/bible

The psalmist is addressing what appears to be a reflection on what has preceded from 118:5-13, particularly 118:10-13. Regarding this note that while it was "I" who cut them off, it was "in the name of The LORD" that this was accomplished, and it is clear that The LORD was his Savior in this act.

Additional Elements

"The word 'strength' denotes his power in saving, while 'salvation' suggests the whole process of his mighty acts, his judgment on the adversaries, and his help to his children, including the final climatic celebrations of his victory."¹⁸

Songs are argued to be shouts of joy.¹⁹

It appears that the psalmist has identified himself as righteous, or among the righteous through his song (noting the connection to 118:15-16 where "songs of salvation are in the tents of the *righteous*").

The psalmist has articulated that The LORD is his song and salvation. He states that *glad songs of salvation* are in the tents of the righteous and he then provides a sampling of them, songs that make much of The LORD's delivering right hand.

The LORD's right hand

Testimony through worshipful song - The LORD's salvation and deliverance of Israel from Egypt: Exodus 15:6 "Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy."

Rejoicing in and trusting The LORD who delivers: Psalm 20:6-7 "Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God."

Testimony of The LORD's works and salvation: Psalm 98:1 "Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him."

"God's 'right hand' refers to his omnipotence, the divine power to act triumphantly in any seemingly impossible situation."²⁰

118:17-20 Live to declare.

This section has continuity to it, but it is a continuity amidst strong individual parts. The psalmist is a member of the kingdom of priests, a people who by calling and design declare the excellencies of God which range from care, deliverance, to discipline, and formal worship.

It appears that the psalmist's confidence in continuing to live and not die is at least in part rooted in the deliverances that he has recorded throughout the psalm and which at the minimal serve as examples of a man who has known the kindness of the Savior. Further, while he clearly expected to die some day and he has now been long deceased he still spoke of the celebration of life that he had on account of The LORD, as one could testify as he did in 118:7 that he shall look in triumph on those who hate him. He is a man who could express confidence in The LORD's salvation, that he is not fearful/worried about death, but speaks that he will continue living and living so as to testify to The LORD's great deeds.

To what end have you exercised thanksgiving for The LORD's kind grace of life, deliverance, and salvation?

The psalmist goes on to introduce a most unexpected element, namely that The LORD has severely disciplined him and the only qualifier he provides is that it was not unto death. So, how does this element fit into the larger narrative? It is not wholly clear. Perhaps it was an expression of the breadth of care he has enjoyed, or perhaps the turmoil he suffered was

¹⁸ VanGemenen, Pg. 854 (the original text included various parenthetical details including cross references and phonetical breakdown of selected terms).

¹⁹ VanGemenen, Pg. 855

²⁰ Lawson, Pg. 229

in some measure on account of discipline. This appears to be the conclusion of Steven Lawson who states, "God was using this trial for his own good to severely discipline, develop, and deepen him."²¹

Whatever the context, what is clear is that The LORD disciplines his own with punitive action with the aim to restore, or as a father with his son.

Deuteronomy 8:1-10 makes it clear that among the provisional graces and care The LORD extends to his people he disciplines them as a father with his son with the objective of securing restoration toward obedience, toward fearing The LORD and keeping his commandments. "Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him." Deuteronomy 8:5-6

Psalms 94:12, also articulates that discipline, while not always delighted in, is a blessing, "Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O LORD, and whom you teach out of your law...."

The psalmist then requests that the gates of righteousness be opened for him that he might give thanks to The LORD.

Regarding this the NET Bible makes the contextual conclusion that this is a reference to entering the Temple and therefore translates the first portion of the verse as "Open for me the gates of the just king's temple!"²²

The ESV Study Bible concurs with what appears to be the natural conclusion that these are the gates to the Temple and the reference to the righteous is a reference to The LORD's people.²³ These are the people who are identified by the covenant love of The LORD that endures forever and a consequential element of this covenant relationship is Temple worship, coming to the special presence of The LORD among men.

Some commentators argue that the psalm as a whole is expressed as a liturgical exercise, being sung as a people are led to the Temple and then at this point in the psalm there is a liturgical exchange of requests and answers with the intent of gaining access to the place of worship. Among those who hold to this conclusion is Arnold Rhodes.

Rhodes argues for a strong liturgical application of the psalm as a whole, even that it had original components that have been folded into a liturgical unit for corporate worship when going to the Temple, perhaps on the Feast of Tabernacles. With this in view he states that a procession of worshippers has been led to the Temple while singing the elements of the psalm and that 118:19 serves as a call to welcome them in to worship, and then 118:20 would serve as the answer back to them.²⁴

118:21 The immediate core context/catalyst of the psalm.

At this time the psalmist appears to be speaking directly to The LORD - thanking him for answering him (referencing back to 118:5) and for having become his salvation (referencing back to 118:14). The psalmist is affirming that which has been established in the prior narrative: he has been answered and he has been saved - for these things he gives thanks.

As expressed with 118:5 this also appears to be a key summary of the whole psalm: giving thanks, having cried and been answered, and The LORD as his salvation.

118:22-28 The rejected cornerstone.

While an extremely well known reference on account of its greater application in the New Testament context, one needs to discern where it fits in its original context.

²¹ Lawson, Pg. 229

²² NET Bible, Psalm 118:19

²³ ESV SB, Pg. 1092

²⁴ Rhodes, Pgs. 161-163

To present the general breakdown has been as follows:

118:1-4	The LORD's covenant love.
118:5	The LORD hears and delivers.
118:6-7	The LORD is on my side.
118:8-9	The LORD is my refuge.
118:10-13	The LORD is my deliverer.
118:14-18	The LORD is my salvation.
118:19-20	The LORD's Temple.
118:21	The LORD hears and delivers.

Now, at 118:22 a unique element to the psalm, and for the most part the Old Testament in general is introduced, namely the rejected stone that has become the cornerstone.

Some, such as Willem VanGemeren have argued that the rejected stone could be a metaphorical expression of the rejection of the one who was threatened and rescued as expressed throughout the psalm.²⁵ Others argued that it was the nations looking down and even rejecting the covenant nation of Israel as a whole. However, the trouble I have with these conclusions are the exceptional elevation that is occurring from rejection to cornerstone, especially when following the pattern of the psalm which would mean from rejection to salvation to elevation. The elevation of the delivered just appears too substantial, even with the tempering focus that it was The LORD who has done this. However, that may very well be why it is picked up by Jesus and the Apostles, it could not find a proper application outside of Messiah. It may be that this is the root from which the New Covenant application would truly blossom.

Further, the New Testament draws out that there is a greater salvation needed, a salvation beyond the deliverance from one's natural enemies. This greater need would be satisfied with the stone being rejected (rejection by the Jews and their leaders) and then its preeminent elevation of cornerstone in the fulfillment of the purposes of God and the exultation of the Risen Son.

The psalmist, recognizing that the aforementioned graces are wholly The LORD's doing, calls on all persons to rejoice in this day, this day of deliverance, salvation, and exultation. There would certainly be a greater day of deliverance as referenced with the greater cornerstone, but today is still a day of joyful celebration as The LORD who keeps his covenant faithfulness was pleased to act for his glory and for the benefit of his people.

The rejoicing in this day of salvation has encouraged continued petition to The LORD.²⁶ Such is the character of a people who know that they have been heard, who know that they have been delivered, who know that they have been cared for by The LORD – they petition in prayer all the more. LORD, be pleased to save us. LORD, be pleased to give us covenant blessing by means of success.

Save us... Savior

The psalmist has given thanks to God his Savior and he petitions here that The LORD would save his people. He petitions The LORD who is a Savior to his people. Just as he has exuberantly praised God for this enduring steadfast or covenant keeping love and will do so again as he closes the psalm, so also is this God a Savior in his covenant fidelity.

Exodus 14:30, "Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore."

Deuteronomy 20:2-4, "And when you draw near to the battle, the priest shall come forward and speak to the people and shall say to them, 'Hear, O Israel, today you are drawing near for battle against your enemies: let not your heart faint. Do not fear or panic or be in dread of them, for the LORD your God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory.'"

²⁵ VanGemeren, Pg. 857

²⁶ VanGemeren, Pg. 857

Deuteronomy 33:29, "Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, the shield of your help, and the sword of your triumph! Your enemies shall come fawning to you, and you shall tread upon their backs."

Judges 2:18, "Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he *saved* them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them."

1 Samuel 14:23, "So the LORD *saved* Israel that day. And the battle passed beyond Beth-aven."

2 Samuel 3:18, "Now then bring it about, for the LORD has promised David, saying, 'By the hand of my servant David I will *save* my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines, and from the hand of all their enemies.'"

2 Kings 13:5, "Therefore the LORD gave Israel a *savior*, so that they escaped from the hand of the Syrians, and the people of Israel lived in their homes as formerly."

2 Kings 19:33-34, "By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city, declares the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David."

Isaiah 33:22, "For The LORD is our judge; The LORD is our lawgiver; The LORD is our king; he will *save* us."

Isaiah 35:4, "Say to those who have an anxious heart, 'Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and *save* you.'"

Isaiah 43:3, "For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your *Savior*. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you."

Isaiah 45:22, "Turn to me and be *saved*, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other."

Jeremiah 33:16, "In those days Judah will be *saved*, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'"

Jeremiah 42:11, "Do not fear the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid. Do not fear him, declares the LORD, for I am with you, to save you and to deliver you from his hand."

Ezekiel 34:22-23, "I will *rescue* my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd."

"Save us, we pray" is transliterated into the Greek word "Hosanna."²⁷

The psalmist next makes what would appear to be a standard affirmation: "The LORD is God" – he is God and there is no other. Further, The LORD who is God, has made his light to shine upon us, a statement that directs our attention back to the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6.

"The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. 'So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.'"
Numbers 6:22-27

Giving his people light was an expression of having shown favor.²⁸

Following this affirmation of The LORD as God and his delight in expressing favor upon his people is a unique reference to an element of Temple worship, namely the element of animal sacrifice. However, this reference is not in keeping with standard articulation of the practice of binding and sacrificing so there are a variety of conclusions as to how this should be properly translated and understood. However, of the many conclusions examined Derek Kidner appeared to be the most helpful. He argues that it is reasonable that the Hebrew could be rendered, to bring the sacrifice bound up to the horns of the altar as opposed to binding the animal to the horns of the altar.²⁹ Therefore, it was not that the animal was bound at the altar, but that it was bound in its being brought to the altar. Ultimately though the emphasis is going to be on

²⁷ ESV SB, Pg. 1092

²⁸ Rhodes, Pg. 162

²⁹ Kidner, Pg. 451

Temple worship, the system that The LORD established for his covenant people to express not only obedience and restoration, was also used to express thanksgiving to The LORD, their Deliverer.

To this end, while the psalmist has just affirmed that The LORD is God (118:27), he is now stating that he is specifically/personally his God.

Affirming that The LORD is his God he states that he will respond in two precise ways: he will give thanks to him and he will extol him.

Thanksgiving in Psalm 118

118:1 "give thanks to The LORD for he is good"

118:19 "that I may... give thanks to The LORD"

118:21 "I thank you that you have answered me"

118:28 "I will give thanks to you"

118:29 "give thanks to The LORD"

118:29 Closing call to worship The LORD.

The psalmist closes in the exact same way that he opened the psalm, by calling the believing community, the covenant community to be a people of thanks. He has articulated his own account of thanksgiving and now invites all to "...give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!"

It is quite clear that your story will be nothing of a like nature to the psalmist's story, but there is no shortage of opportunity to embrace the principles of truth he has articulated and to give thanks for the elements that you have been given to testify to those who would hear.

Jesus as the Rejected Stone that Became the Cornerstone

William Varner provides a helpful examination of how Psalm 118 was likely used during Jesus' Passion Week:³⁰

1. Verses 25 and 26 were cited by the crowds who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem on "Palm Sunday" (Matt 21:9; Mark 11:9).
2. Verse 22 was the punch line in a parable of the Lord Jesus during his confrontation with the Jewish leaders on Tuesday morning (Matt. 21:42).
3. Verse 26 was quoted by Jesus at the end of his pronouncement of "woes" on the scribes and Pharisees on Tuesday afternoon (Matt. 23:39).
4. Since Psalm 118 is sung at the end of the Passover Seder, this passage was on the lips of Jesus on that fateful Thursday night in the upper room, in the shadow of Calvary (Matt. 26:30). In that week the horns of the altar became the arms of the cross, and the festival found its fulfillment in "Messiah our Passover Lamb" (1 Cor. 5:7).

³⁰ Varner, Pg. 299 (quoted in full)

The Acting Agents: The Psalmist and his God

There are strong themes throughout the psalm and various uses of poetic emphasis and redundancy, but do not lose sight of the exceptional action taking place in the psalm and the acting agents. The psalmist is doing much... but The LORD is clearly the greater doer.

The psalmist does:

118:5	Out of distress I called on The LORD
118:6	I will not fear
118:7	I shall look in triumph on those who hate me
118:10	In the name of The LORD I cut off nations surrounding me
118:11	In the name of The LORD I cut off nations surrounding me
118:12	In the name of The LORD I cut off nations surrounding me
118:17	I shall not die
118:17	I shall live
118:17	I shall recount the deeds of The LORD
118:19	A desire to enter through the gates of righteousness
118:19	A desire to give thanks to The LORD
118:21	I thank The LORD for answering me
118:21	I thank The LORD for becoming my salvation
118:24	A desire to rejoice and be glad in the day The LORD has made
118:25	I pray The LORD save us
118:25	I pray The LORD give us success
118:28	I will give thanks to The LORD
118:28	I will extol The LORD

As much as the psalmist does... it is clearly *The LORD who is doing:*

118:5	The LORD answered me
118:5	The LORD set me free
118:13	The LORD helped me
118:14	The LORD is my strength
118:14	The LORD is my song
118:14	The LORD has become my salvation
118:15/16	The right hand of The LORD does valiantly
118:15/16	The right hand of The LORD exalts
118:15/16	The right hand of The LORD does valiantly
118:18	The LORD has discipline me severely
118:21	The LORD answered me
118:21	The LORD became my salvation
118:23	The LORD has made the rejected stone the cornerstone
118:24	The LORD has made this day
118:27	The LORD has made his light to shine upon us