

Never Abandoned in the Smoke

By Mindy Ferguson

Ever felt like God has abandoned you? Read on for a biblical insight from author Mindy Ferguson.

An interesting passage caught my eye during my study time this week. Though I am like a wineskin in the smoke, I do not forget your decrees (Psalm 119:83 NIV). I immediately began searching my commentaries and Bible dictionaries to understand what this vivid imagery was intended to communicate. I discovered that in ancient times when goat skin bottles were used to carry wine, the leather vessels could be destroyed if they were carelessly hung near a smoky fire. A smoke exposed wineskin would not only become blackened by soot, but dried up, parched, and shriveled – rendered useless from its time near the fire.

Wondering what circumstances might have stirred such despair, I read the surrounding verses of the psalm. I particularly like the New Living Translation:

I faint with longing for your salvation; but I have put my hope in your word. My eyes are straining to see your promises come true. When will you comfort me? I am shriveled like a wineskin in the smoke, exhausted with waiting. But I cling to your principles and obey them. How long must I wait? When will you punish those who persecute me? -Psalm 119:81-84 NLT

I felt instant kinship with the psalmist as I read of his determination to cling to the promise of God's faithfulness throughout a long period of persecution and trial. I too have experienced a few difficult seasons when I felt exhausted and shriveled from the fires of life. Prolonged periods of affliction or hardship can sometimes make us feel like God has left us hanging too long in the smoke. There are days when our eyes burn from searching His Word for a promise to which we can cling. And yes, we often become weary in our wait. But like the psalmist, our hope is in God's Word. As believers in Christ, we are promised that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28). Ecclesiastes 8:6 tells us there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a man's misery weighs heavily upon him. And 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 says, We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

Yes, the trials of life can sometimes tempt us to believe that God has carelessly abandoned us too close to the fire. But God is always working for the good of His children. He knows the proper time to act and even though our burdens weigh heavily upon us, we have to trust that He will never leave us hanging so long in the smoke that we're destroyed and rendered useless for His service.

Are circumstances in your life causing you to feel like a smoky wineskin? Put your hope in God's Word. Though your eyes may strain and burn as you watch for God's promises to come true, hold unswervingly to the hope [you] profess, for he who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:23).

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About the Author...

Mindy founded Fruitful Word Ministries in April of 2003. She has been involved in women's ministry for years, teaching Bible studies, facilitating small groups, and coordinating special events. Mindy served on the praise team for Beth Moore Bible studies for five years and was on staff for three years at her home church as Director of Curriculum Development. Mindy's writings have appeared in LifeLine Journal, the P31 Woman magazine, Just Between Us magazine, and Chicken Soup for the Mother of Preschoolers' Soul. She is the author of Walking with God, an in-depth women's Bible study released in January of 2007. Mindy currently lives in a suburb of Houston, Texas with her husband and two children. Visit her website at www.fruitfulword.org.