

Psalm 10 • Arise, O LORD; forget not the afflicted

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Let's move on. We're going to go to Psalm chapter 10.

Psalm chapter 10. We're going to read through the Psalm and then get into it here.

- ¹ Why, O LORD, do you stand far away?
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?*
- ² In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor;
let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised.*
- ³ For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul,
and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD.*
- ⁴ In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him;
all his thoughts are, "There is no God."*
- ⁵ His ways prosper at all times;
your judgments are on high, out of his sight;
as for all his foes, he puffs at them.*
- ⁶ He says in his heart, "I shall not be moved;
throughout all generations I shall not meet adversity."*
- ⁷ His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression;
under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.*
- ⁸ He sits in ambush in the villages;
in hiding places he murders the innocent.
His eyes stealthily watch for the helpless;*
- ⁹ he lurks in ambush like a lion in his thicket;
he lurks that he may seize the poor;
he seizes the poor when he draws him into his net.*
- ¹⁰ The helpless are crushed, sink down,
and fall by his might.*
- ¹¹ He says in his heart, "God has forgotten,
he has hidden his face, he will never see it."*
- ¹² Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand;
forget not the afflicted.*
- ¹³ Why does the wicked renounce God
and say in his heart, "You will not call to account"?*
- ¹⁴ But you do see, for you note mischief and vexation,*

*that you may take it into your hands;
to you the helpless commits himself;
you have been the helper of the fatherless.*
¹⁵ *Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer;
call his wickedness to account till you find none.*
¹⁶ *The LORD is king forever and ever;
the nations perish from his land.*
¹⁷ *O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted;
you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear*
¹⁸ *to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed,
so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.” (ESV)*

Wow, this is a powerful Psalm. It's obviously a cry of the heart, but it's a cry of a heart that is not crying necessarily for himself. He's crying for others. He's crying for the poor. He's crying for those who are being taken advantage of. He's crying for the afflicted.

And let me just say this: He's crying for the people that it's just too easy to ignore. It's just too easy to go on with our lives and not worry about them or not think about them or quote things like, well, Jesus said the poor you will always have among you. So, it's just one of those things—

One of the things about the psalmist is that his heart breaks for others, and I believe that this is one of the keys of effective prayer because it is expressing the heart of the Lord for other people. The heart of this psalm goes beyond my own needs and my own issues and my own problems, and it thinks about the needs and issues and problems of others, and particularly those who can't seem to stand up or fight for themselves.

And the very first thing that the psalmist begins with is a question to the Lord in verse 1 where he says:

“Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? (Have you ever asked God that? He says—in fact, he says) Why do you hide yourself...?”

Many times, from our perspective, when we're looking at the issues of the world, which are very unfair and very difficult to deal with, it looks as if God is standing at a great distance away from the problem. And sometimes it even looks like He has hidden Himself completely.

And so, this question by the psalmist is then followed by a lengthy explanation in verses 2 through 11 of what he refers to as the wicked. We won't go through

and read these verses again, but you'll notice that of the titles and descriptions he gives to the wicked are: the arrogant, boastful, prideful, godless, speaking in a way saying, there is no God, confident in himself, prosperous due to his evil dealings, blasphemous, speaking boastful things against the Lord, deceitful in his dealings with others, cruel— particularly as it relates to how he deals with the weak and the powerless. And the descriptions go on in those verses 2 through 11.

When you get to verse 12, that's when the psalmist calls upon the Lord to take action, and you'll notice in verse 12, he says:

“Arise, O LORD; (which is to say get up and move on behalf of this situation that is so out of control. He says) O God, lift up your hand; (and then he tells him to) forget not the afflicted.” Don't forget these people, Lord.

Because you see, in society it's just too easy to forget them, to go on with our business and just forget these people because they've always been around. There's been poor people since the very beginning and they're still here today. And you know what? It's just too easy to forget. So, he calls upon the Lord to forget not the afflicted.

In fact, in verse 18, he even asked the Lord to break the arm of the wicked. That's not a literal, give him a broken arm. Whenever the Bible speaks of arm, it speaks of strength. Okay? The arm of the Lord is the strength of the Lord. The arm of man is the strength of man. So, when the psalmist says, break the arm of the wicked he's saying, break his power, and specifically break his ability to inflict damage.

This is what David— is the psalmist—I'm not positive this is David, but— the psalmist is calling upon the Lord to do: to stop the ongoing work of damage that's being done by this wicked destroyer.

And then you'll notice like in— like so many other Psalms, this one ends again with a declaration of faith— which is really amazing in light of all the negativity that you read in this psalm, about how awful the wicked person is.

And the voice of the psalmist—which begins by saying, how long are You going to stand at a distance here and not do anything about this problem? In fact, why do You even hide yourself at times?— I want you to notice how he begins to speak in verse 17. Look at verse 17. This is— these are the words of faith. He says:

*“O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; (Did you catch that?)
you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear
¹⁸ to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed,
so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.”*

Now, guys, this is important. This is the same writer—this is the same psalmist who began this Psalm by saying, Why, oh, Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself? So, what happened to change his tune? What happened between—

I mean, I've prayed before and said to the Lord, why? Why are you so distant? I think we all have, and if we haven't spoken it from our mouths, we felt it during a time of difficulty or whatever. We've thought to ourselves as we pray, well, God sure— He seems, feels like He's a million miles away. Where's God? People will even say, where's God when you need Him? Well, that's a pretty negative reaction to what we conceive to be or perceive as a lack of God's presence.

So, how in the world do you go from that to verses 17 and 18 where he begins to just issue forth these statements of faith: You will hear the desire of the afflicted; You will strengthen their hearts; You will incline your ear; You will do justice, and so on and so on?

You have to ask the question, did the psalmist see a change that caused him to switch his tune in the middle of this psalm? In other words, did he begin praying this prayer, and in the middle of his prayer, God answered it, and suddenly things were all better now?

I seriously doubt it. In fact, I believe the psalmist is still waiting on the Lord to move, even when he's saying what he's saying in verses 17 and 18. In other words, he's still feeling as if the Lord is standing far off and yet he's saying what he's saying in verses 17 and 18, because, once again, he's employing the language of faith— something you and I rarely do in our prayers.

We are good at complaining. We're good at telling God how lousy it is— our situation, and we're really good at giving advice on what we think He ought to do about it. What we are not good at is declaring faith, speaking words of faith, which we see the psalmist do over and over again.

And you know why we don't do it? Because we don't feel like it. We've talked about this before in our study of the Psalms. We've gotten to a place in our

culture, as you well know, where if we don't feel something, we just can't bring ourselves to express it.

I don't believe the psalmist was feeling it. I believe he expressed it because it was the voice of faith and the language of faith, and didn't have anything to do with feelings—and I think the psalmist understood that faith doesn't have anything to do with feelings.

That's where you and I err. We err on this whole situation of praying and talking to the Lord. We think faith and feelings do have a connection, and therefore, if we don't feel it, we don't speak it. I just don't really feel like praising the Lord today. I don't really feel like worshipping the Lord. I'm just down. I just don't, I don't feel like, I just don't feel it, man. I'm just not feeling it.

Have you ever heard somebody say that to you? I'm just not feeling it. And we employ that sort of an idea in the context of so many things in our lives, including marriage. Boy, we got married and we were so in love, but years have gone by and I'm just not feeling it anymore for my wife. I'm just not feeling it.

What's a guy to do when you're just not feeling it anymore? Well, the Bible says: Husbands, love your wives. It doesn't say if you're feeling it; it just says do it. There's a place for obedience. There's a place for stepping out and doing even when the feeling isn't there.

And that's what the psalmist is doing in prayer. He doesn't feel like saying, the Lord will. What he feels like saying is, God, why are you so distant? Why are you standing so far off? Why have you hidden yourself? That's what he feels—and there's nothing wrong with expressing that feeling to the Lord. There's no point in denying it.

But the point is, we're not going to live there. That's the point. We're not going to live there. It's not going to be my permanent address. I'll express it to the Lord, but then I'm going to come back and say, but, Lord—and then I'm going to begin to speak words of faith based on what? Character, knowledge of God and His name, and knowledge of His promises—because those have to come into play eventually.

God has spoken incredible things to us in His Word, and when you and I repeat those things back to Him in prayer, but, Lord, You said—and then you begin to just say—

I've told you guys this many times over the years: Corrie Ten Boom, one of my favorite authors from years past, spent years in a concentration camp, German concentration camp, went around the world, speaking for Christ. But she would talk about how the devil would come along and tell her that she was a debtor, and he would do it by exploiting whatever difficult circumstance she happened to be in at that particular moment. Because we all go through them.

We go through difficult times, and tragedies, and so on and so forth, and it's that time the enemy loves to come and kick us when we're down, and tell us how little we have and how little we can expect from God, and on and on.

And she would talk about it, how the devil would speak to her of her lack and how much of a pauper she was. So, she said, every time the devil would do that — she says, I would get out my Bible, and I'd take a piece of paper and a pen, and I would write out the promises of God as if I was writing a check.

And she would rip it out, and she'd say, there, that pays off that debt—whatever you're trying to convince me of that I have a lack about, here's the fulfillment of it. Here's the grace of God. Here's the promise of God. Here's the goodness of God and so on. And she would say eventually that you got to come back at those things with the positive elements of putting your faith in the Lord.

But, God, should be a part of all of our conversation as it relates to the difficulties that we're going through. Once we get done spewing everything that's happening, there ought to be that word of faith that says, but, God, no matter how difficult it may be—

But, God—right? You see, that's what we're seeing here again in this song. That's why the language changes between the beginning of the Psalm and then verses 17 and 18. That's why there's such a drastic change because the language of faith is now being brought to bear upon these situations.

And that happens, you guys, when the eyes of the heart are given the opportunity to gaze upon the character of God and His promises. If we don't take time to do that in the midst of our discouragement, it will only get worse. Unless we come back and bathe our hearts in the promises of God—and I mean bathe because you know the difficulties of life put all kinds of grit and grime and stickers and garbage in your heart, you got to have that stuff washed out, or it's just going to sit and irritate and cause great discouragement, great depression, and hopelessness ultimately.

Hopelessness is a terrible thing, but you know there's so much hope that we have in God. But that hope is rejuvenated as we spend time in His Word, focusing on His character, His promises, and so forth, and declaring those things by faith in the language of faith that says, but God will hear my prayer. God sees my tears. God knows my pain. God knows the difficulty of my situation. God knows how challenging this thing is, and He will not sit idly by while I languish in pain. The Lord will come to my rescue.

Doesn't that sound like David? Doesn't that sound like the Psalms? It needs to begin to sound like our prayers.

I was reading an article about meditating on the character of God and how it can transform our thoughts, prayers, and so forth, and I actually came upon a paragraph that I thought I'd share with you because I thought it was really good. Let me put it up on the screen for you. It's a little bit long, but here's how it goes. This author says:

I know what it's like to go through dark times and to be so fearful that it's hard to pray. But I've also learned how eager and able our God is to comfort, and strengthen us during our difficult times. I've discovered that one of the ways we can tap into His supernatural power and peace is to meditate on His character. And this is something that greatly pleases the Lord, because He told the prophet Jeremiah: "... let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD." (Jeremiah 9:24) Meditating on scriptures that speak of God's character can give us deeper insights into His divine nature that will enable us to know Him more intimately and to trust Him more fully, even in desperate times.

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Isn't that a great quote? I read that and it just resonated with me so much. I thought, yes! Knowing God— isn't that what David said in verse 10 in the

previous psalm? Those who know the Lord will trust in Him. Those who know the name of the Lord will trust in Him. That we saw in the previous psalm. Now, you'll notice that it quotes Jeremiah 9:24 there. Let me show you the whole Jeremiah passage. It goes like this:

Jeremiah 9:24 (ESV)

“...let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

“...let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD (and look at this) who practices steadfast love, (who practices) justice, and (practices) righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

Isn't that great? He says, if you're going to boast, boast in this, that you know that this is Me, that I delight in things like practicing steadfast love.

When's the last time you added that to the difficulty of your prayer, as you're pouring out your heart and telling the Lord how difficult the situation is, but you come back and you say, but, Lord, I know that You practice steadfast love and I'm in desperate need of Your steadfast love, and I thank You right now that You are the God who practices steadfast love?

And you begin to know more things about Him and more things about His character that you introduce into your prayers as you speak those things by faith, making declaration of them in the language of faith that changes your perspective, and so forth.

Our prayer needs to be, Lord, give my prayers that element of faith. I'm good at telling you what I need. I'm good at complaining about how difficult my life is, but help me to add to my prayers that element of faith that knows You so intimately that I can speak those things even when they appear to be absent.

Right? I'm talking about speaking things that you don't feel. When you're not feeling the love from God and yet you speak about how He practices loving kindness, you're declaring faith into the darkness; you're speaking light into the darkness, and on it goes.

And so, there's such an importance here to knowing the Lord, to knowing His Word, and to meditating upon His character. I always encourage you as you're reading through the Bible—electronic or paper—to highlight those verses in

the Word of God, where the Lord speaks of His character, speaks of who He is, how He deals with mankind, and also that speak of His attributes. Highlight those, and do your best to read them over and over. Maybe write them in the front of your Bible, in those places where you have a few blank pages of just white. Just write them in there. Just write all kinds of different passages that speak of just who God is, and so forth.

And then, as difficulties arise and you're praying through things, go back and revisit those verses and meditate on them. To meditate simply means to think deeply— and it's frankly a lost art in our culture today because we don't really take time to think very much at all, let alone, deeply. We're so fast-paced in our culture today.

We need to take time to meditate on the Word of the Lord and just to think about what it means, and maybe to even journal what it means, to take a verse of the Bible, to write it on a piece of paper, and then pray and write down what the Lord gives you. Write down bullet points and highlights and key words of the verse and things that are going to spur you on to further thoughts, and allow the Lord to speak to you about those verses as you do. Very key to enlightening our time of prayer.