

Psalm 77 • A cure for hopeless depression

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Psalm chapter 77. This is an interesting Psalm because it's one of those Psalms where the psalmist, the writer of this Psalm really lets it all hang out in terms of letting you and I see what's going on in his heart which is great weakness.

And assuming here as we do that Asaph is the writer, he is in, what appears from these verses, to be a deep depression and he can't shake it. And he'll tell you in as this Psalm goes on, of the various things that he did to try to shake the depression and it just wasn't working.

It says in verse 1,

"I cry aloud to God, (aloud to God) and he will hear me.

2 In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted.

3 When I remember God, I moan; when I meditate, my spirit faints." (ESV)

Now this is an interesting statement because the psalmist is admitting to you that he's trying to fill his heart with the thoughts of God, and it's getting worse. His depression is actually getting worse. And he uses rather poetic language to describe it.

But he says, my soul is refusing to be comforted, and the more I remember God, the more I moan. And the more I meditate on the things of the Lord, my spirit, he says, becomes faint within me.

And so he's having a hard time reconciling his very challenging personal circumstances with the power of God. He's thinking about the power of God and he's coming up empty. And he's going, well, then why am I going through all this? Why is this happening to me? Right? As I think about the power of God, and I think about the things of the Lord, I think, well, this is terrible. I'm in this terrible circumstance. And he's not getting any better.

Look at verse 4; again, poetic language.

He says,

"You hold my eyelids open; (You and I would just simply say to God, I have not been able to get any sleep because of my distress over this situation. And look what he goes on to say at the end of verse 4.) I am so troubled that I cannot speak."

I don't know; statements like that begin to show the level of difficulty that this man is experiencing because words escape him. He can't even describe to others what's going on. And I don't know if you've ever been that troubled where you just couldn't even talk; couldn't even talk.

And then next thing he's going to try is he's going to think about how the Lord has blessed him in the past.

He says,

"⁵ I consider the days of old, the years long ago. (And)

⁶ I said, "Let me remember my song in the night; let me meditate in my heart."

And so he's thinking about the ways that the Lord, took care of him in the past. Which by the way, is actually a good thing. It's not helping this time, but there's nothing wrong with that. There's nothing wrong about going back and recounting how God has delivered you in the past. We've talked about it and we've talked that's actually a that's a good thing to do. But it's not working.

He says,

" Then my spirit made a diligent search."

Verse 7. And he begins to ask a series of questions.

"Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable?

⁸ Has his steadfast love forever ceased?"

In other words, is He done loving me?

I get notes from Christians all the time who are worried about God's love having come to an end for one reason or another. And there's a great fear in people's minds that due to their actions, due to their lack of devotion, due to their distractions with other things, God's going to stop loving them.

In fact, I had a, I'm not going to mention any names. But I had a young, she didn't attend our fellowship but I had a young girl write me recently and asked me, how do you deal with like hobbies and things that you do in your spare time?

And she went on to say, I get really concerned that if I enjoy myself with these things, I'm not giving my time sufficiently to God. And so she's like, how do you do that? How do you... I know that the Lord needs to be number one in my life, but there's a lot of other things that I enjoy doing. How do you... She was saying, how do you strike a balance?

And I wrote her back and I said, well, you got to understand that the very first thing before anything else, is that, I don't worry about Him not loving me, because I've gotten my life out of balance.

We all get our lives out of balance from time to time. We all go through periods where, our attention to the Lord wanes to some degree. And we're not in the Word like we used to. We're not spending prayer, time in prayer, perhaps, as we did before. And we're fixated on maybe some other things. Some things we're enjoying or things that are distracting us from the Lord. It happens. And when it happens, I trust that the Lord's going to bring sufficient conviction that we'll get back on track.

But the conviction of the Lord is not a statement to you that He is somehow at the end of His rope. And He might just possibly stop loving you if you don't get this thing straightened out. See, that's the issue in a lot of people's minds. It really isn't... The issue really isn't, tell me how to deal with my spare time and my hobbies. The issue is, does God love me no matter what. That's what the issue is. It comes down to God's unconditional love.

And frankly, Christians, if you're not convinced of God's unconditional love, then nothing you do is going to be good enough. And you're going to be constantly in a state of worry about whether God is going to pull His love from you. If you are convinced of God's unconditional love then, you'll never worry about it. And in fact, it will draw you to spend more time with Him devotionally, ultimately. And, because you know that He loves you no matter

what. Isn't that funny? The more God sets us free, the more we want to spend time with Him.

When I hear some people talk about their understanding of God's love for them, I wonder if they ever pray at all. Because I don't know about you, but I probably wouldn't want to go talk to somebody who I thought was always mad at me. Or who was always ready to cut me off at the first wrong move. I don't know about you, but I wouldn't want to go talk to that person. I would probably stay away from that person.

And what's really sad is that there are Christians who believe that Jesus died on the cross for them, who struggle with the idea that God's going to take His love away. And it's a very, very sad thing. And... But I believe the Lord can bring healing there. I believe that the Lord can transform a heart.

The Bible says, *"...perfect love casts out fear."* (John 4:18) And that's true. When you believe in the perfect love of God, it casts out fear. You stop being afraid that tomorrow if I make a mistake, God's not going to love me. Or He's not going to be with me. Or He's not going to bless me. Good grief! Good grief! If God based that on our activities and our mistakes, we would all be dog meat right now. Right here we'd be dead. Right?

I mean, let's just face it. If my relationship with God was based on my mistakes and His love for me was predicated, or lack of love for me, was predicated on my mistakes, He would hate me. There'd be nothing to love. Because I have constantly made mistakes in my life. But when we as Christians get a hold of the fact that God is merciful. That He delights to show mercy, that He loves us because He has chosen to love us, it truly sets us free.

So, whatever is going on in Asaph's heart here, it's just not working. And so he's asking these questions. Has His love ceased?

He goes on,

"Are his promises at an end for all time?"

9 Has God forgotten to be gracious?"

Isn't that a good question? Has God forgotten how to be gracious? Sometimes we act like He has. We do. We act like He's forgotten how to be gracious. And he says, *"has he in anger shut up his compassion?"* Is He so mad that He's no longer going to be compassionate when I mess up?

So this is just really a struggle-some time for Asaph, as he's telling us about this. But in verse 10, he begins to have a breakthrough. And I want you to see this. He says,

"Then I said, 'I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High.'"

Now stop there for just a moment. When Asaph refers to *"the years of the right hand"* the right hand is always power. Okay? That's why Jesus is seated at the right hand, the throne of God. That's at the power, the place of power. The right hand always is a representation of power.

So, he is saying, I will remember the years of the power of the Most High. And he's going to begin to recount that for us. But when he talks about the years, he's talking about the past and how God has responded to His people throughout the past. And what has really grabbed a hold of Asaph at this point, is what we call the immutability of God. And when we say immutability, that's just a long word that means He is unchanging.

God doesn't change. He doesn't change His mind. He doesn't change His personality. He doesn't change His character. And the thing that Asaph is as he's looking back upon the years of the Lord, he is reminding himself that God doesn't change.

And so when he thinks about how God has been faithful in the past, he's going to begin to encourage himself in the answers to all of these questions that he has asked here. Where he says. is God never again going to be favorable? Has he ceased having steadfast love for people? Are His promises all... Did He basically say, all right, that's it. I'm not... No more promises kept from here on out. Is He just got cranky because we went too far or something like that.

And he says, "Has he forgotten to be gracious? Has he decided he's not going to be compassionate anymore?" Here's all these questions. He says, "I look back upon the years of God's power and what do I see? Do I ever see a time when any of those things happened? No, I don't."

As I look back upon the history of how God has dealt with our nation, I see nothing but God's faithfulness. I see the consistency of His character. I see His mercy played out over and over again. I see His grace played out over and over again. His love for His people, His forgiveness over and over again, and so forth.

And here's what he's going to do.

Verse 11, he says,

"I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, (He says,) I will remember your wonders (And some Bibles actually say, miracles) of old.

12 I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds."

I'm going to look at these things because in this I see the character of God. And I see the unchanging character of God.

And he says in verse 13,

"Your way, O God, is holy. (And you know) What god is great like our God?

14 You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples.

15 You with your arm redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph."

You redeemed us. What does the Bible say? While we were enemies, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:10) We can say the same thing. We can say, when you start thinking, yeah, I haven't been really very good on my devotional life and have... And, to be sure if things have fallen off a little bit, then get back where you need to be.

But the point is, don't start thinking that God's not going to love you or He's going to take His love from you or something like that. Because, good grief, when you were His enemy, He died for you! Now you're His child. And yeah, you might be a dweeby-one from time to time. And you get weak and you get dumb, and you do stupid things, and you make mistakes. But you're still His child. Good grief!

When you were His enemy, He died for you. You think He's going to kick you out now that you're His child and you're messing up? I mean, think about it. Think about it. How weird we are to think like that. I... Certainly the enemy can be involved in that stuff.

And then he begins to talk about how the Lord did some incredible things. He says in verse 16,

"When the waters saw you, O God, when the water saw you, they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled.

17 The clouds poured out water; the skies gave forth thunder; your arrows flashed on every side.

18 The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lighted up the world; the earth trembled and shook.

19 Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints (were not) were unseen.

20 (And) You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron."

And he's going back and he's saying, "Look what You've done. Look what you've done. Look how faithful you've been to lead your people. So here I am sitting here despairing about my life and all that's going on. And suddenly I realize, wait a minute. Wait a minute. God hasn't changed. His love hasn't gone away. His mercy hasn't weakened, or as the Bible even says, or as God says about Himself, His arm is not too short to save. (Isaiah 59:1)

I saw a quote from a guy by the name of Morgan. Let me put this on the screen for you. This is interesting. He said that,

"The message of this psalm is that to brood on sorrow is to be broken and disheartened, while to see God is to sing on the darkest day." (Morgan)

"The message of this psalm is that to brood on sorrow is to be broken and disheartened, while to see God is to sing on the darkest day."

Isn't that good. I like that quote. Because when it comes right down to it, guys, you can sit and you can meditate. And you can sit and think about how your sorrow and how you're feeling. Or you can ponder the unchanging love and power of God. I mean, this is the bottom line and it's your choice what you're, planning on focusing your attention on.

And I love how this writer says, if you're going to sit and brood on your sorrow, you're only going to extend that sense of brokenness and disheartened, discontentedness and it's terrible. I mean, Good grief! We call it self-pity, okay? But to ponder the power of God, the unchanging power of God, is to lift yourself up and to begin to sing on the darkest day. I love that.