

**Tuesday, January 10, 2023 • Read Psalm 77**

Questions from the Scripture text: Into whose hands was this Psalm committed (superscript)? With what instruction? By whom? What had the psalmist done to Whom (v1)? With what? What did He do? When did the psalmist do what (v2a)? How does v2b describe the urgency and importunity? What else will comfort the psalmist (v2c)? What does he do in v3a, but with what result? What is he doing, and in what condition (v3b)? In what personal way does he describe his sleeplessness (v4a)? Why isn't he able to pray in this situation (v4b)? What has he thought about (v5)? How carefully is he thinking about this (v6)? But what does it seem to him is happening (v7-9)? What does he set over-against these circumstances (v10-12)? With Whom does he interact over these memories in vv13-15? What does he specifically remember in v16-19 (cf. Ex 14:21-22)? What did the Lord do then, in the hardest of circumstances, that encourages the psalmist now (v20)?

**What can a believer do when everything in his circumstances suggests that God has abandoned him?** Psalm 77 looks forward to the opening portion of morning public worship on the coming Lord's Day. In these twenty verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **when circumstances seem to suggest that God has abandoned us, we can meditate upon the holy, great, powerful, saving character of our God, and how He has consistently demonstrated it in the history of His dealings with His people.**

**Urgency in prayer** is often shown by using our voice (v1a), while we still can (v4b).

If God gives us difficulty to turn our hearts—and our voices!—to Him, let us learn not to paper it over easily (v2c). There are many things that we should be disturbed about.

**When we can't sense His presence.** Sometimes, the Lord sustains us (cf. 3:5). But sometimes, He withholds the sense of His presence, and this is a providential call to be uncomfortable and yearn for Him persistently and urgently (v1-4)—even sleeplessly (v2b, 4a).

In the midst of this withholding of the sense of His presence, remembering Him can even be painful (v3a). He doesn't seem to be doing us good, as He has done to others before (v5), or even as when sleepless nights still had that presence of His that made us sing (v6a).

**When the moment is too great for us to bear.** Sometimes, instead of seeing the parallels between our lives and His previous work, it can seem in the moment like the answer to the flood of questions in vv7-9 is "yes." Yes, He has cast me off. Yes, I am no longer under grace. Yes, His mercy is gone. Yes, His promise isn't coming true for me. Yes, His compassions have run out. It can seem that way *in the moment*.

When *the moment* seems that way, it is a Spirit-provoked mandate to remember that though our troubles in this world—and ourselves (!) in this world (cf. 39:4-5; 90:9-12)—*are momentary*, God is NOT momentary (v10-11)! How can time-bound creatures weigh the actions of a timeless God?

**When God's ways are too great for us to evaluate.** Even more, how can creatures bound to creatureliness analyze all the works (v12) of Him Whose way is shrouded in holiness (v13a) behind which it is unimaginably immense (v13b)? The painfulness of the impossibility of the task can become the way forward to the remedy: the task is not impossible because there is no answer; the task is impossible because the answer is greater than we can imagine (v14a)!

It is at this point that the Psalmist begins to remember that God's deliverances (v15) have been dreadful to all creatures (v16-18). There is a mixture here of references to the great storm that split the Red Sea and how the fury that was displayed at Sinai recalled the flood itself. At both instances, Israel were terrified! Now, the analysis is not "God isn't delivering me, as He has did deliver them before" but rather "God is terrifying me, as He terrified them before."

But how did the terror end? Straight through the sea (v19a)! They could not see the path that God had laid out (v19b-c), because He lays out paths that simply cannot be seen. Sometimes, the answer to "Why is God taking me through agony, terrifying me, and withholding the sense of His presence from me?" is simply this: because this is sometimes how He leads His sheep (v20).

**When the only thing that we perceive of Him are His means (especially prayer and the Word).** We aren't to live by bread alone. We also mustn't live by the sense of His presence. Sometimes, we are simply to cry out in agony and be sure from His Word of those things that there isn't a hint of a way to know from our circumstances or our feelings.

When have you had not only horrible circumstances, but no sense of the presence of God? If you haven't, yet, then how will you act on this Psalm's reminder that believers ought to expect it?

*Sample prayer: O Lord, Your ways are hidden from us in Your holiness. And if we could see them, we would only know that we cannot understand them. Sometimes, You not only give Your people agonizing circumstances, but even withhold from us the sense of Your presence. Even then, You have given to us to cry out to You with our voices, and to remember from Your Word that You have done this before. But we ask that You would not do this with us now—that You would not withhold the sense of Your presence. But make us to know Your favor now. Make us to know Your mercy now. Make us to see the fulfillment of Your promises. Make us to know Your grace know. By Your Spirit, make us to know the pouring out of Your tender mercies in Christ, giving us the full sense of Your presence in Him, in Whose Name we ask it, AMEN!*

Suggested songs: ARP77A "My Voice to God, Aloud I Plead" or TPH76 "I Cried Aloud to God for Help"

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Psalm 77. These are the words of god. To the chief musician, to judy thin the psalm of asap. I cried out to god with my voice to god with my voice. And he gave ear to me. In the day of my trouble. I sought the lord, my hand was stretched out in the night.

Without ceasing, my soul refused to be comforted, i remembered god and was troubled. I complained in my spirit was overwhelmed, so long. You hold my eyelids open. I am so troubled that i cannot speak. I have considered the days of old the years of ancient times. A call to remembrance my song in the night, a meditate within my heart.

My spirit makes diligent search. Will the lord cast off forever and will he be favorable no more? Has his mercy ceased forever as his promise failed forevermore. Has god forgotten to be gracious as he in anger, shut up as tender mercies. Say law. When i said, This is my anguish.

But i will remember the years of the right hand of the most high. Well, remember the works of the lord Surely, i will remember your wonders of old, i will also meditate on all your work and talk of your deeds. Your way. Oh god is in the sanctuary? Who is so great, a god as our god.

You are the god who does wonders. You have declared your strength among the people's. You have with your arm redeemed, your people, the sons of jacob and joseph say law. The waters saw you. Oh god, the waters saw you. They were afraid, the depths also trembled, the clouds poured out water.

The skies sent out a sound, your arrows also flashed about the voice of your thunder was in the whirlwind. The lightning's lit up the world, the earth trembled,

and shook. Your way was in the sea. Your path and the great waters and your footsteps. We're not not. You led your people like a flock?

By the hand of Moses. And Aaron.

So far, the Reading of gods inspired and Winner and twerked.

Sometimes. In our circumstances, our flesh will Interpret difficulty. As. And a suggestion or an implication that god has abandoned us. But that comes from our flesh, it does not come obviously. Uh, from our faith. But in those moments where it's not so much, the circumstance themselves, But our own Uh, misinterpretation our own unbelief.

Um, that is telling us or perhaps, even the sense of our own sin apart from faith in the gospel of Christ. That is telling us that god has abandoned us. That's not the circumstances that bother us so much. As the. The distress of what it might mean about god's disposition toward us.

This was of course, the great theme of the entire book of Job. Uh, the circumstances were dreadful. But of the circumstances, he said, the Lord giveth the Lord taketh away blessed. Be the name of the Lord. And yet, it was In those days of silences, his thoughts turned over.

And as we see his thoughts, start to come out in his various speeches throughout the book that he Wondered if instead of being gracious and merciful and forgiving his sin that god was actually dealing with him, according to his sin, which is god's right. Although it is not according to god's promise.

And, and so, Believers often find themselves in circumstances in which they are in great distress. And especially, In the great distress. Of wondering if god is against them. And one of the first things that this psalm does then is teach us about urgency and prayer. That urgency in prayer is often shown by using our voice.

I cried out to god with my voice and he repeats it to god with my voice. And he gave ear to me now. God can hear. When we speak to him with our hearts, But it is good to speak to god. With our voice both that we would address him with the whole man and that we are ourselves would confirm even to ourselves.

That we are engaging with god and laying hold of him. Dealing. Really. With him. It's not just god, who hears? But we who here, and when we hear our own voice, We remember that God is greater than we are. And that he hears. And we remember, That in his word throughout his word, even in psalms like this, very one He tells us that he listens to the voices.

Of his children. And so, he hears, not just our hearts, but also our voice. And he hears our urgency and he cares. About the urgency of it. The summary of the entire psalm is he gave ear to me. Then there's no evidence in the psalm. That the situation has been resolved, what's been resolved by the end of the psalm?

In what way did god? Give ear to him. He gave ear to him by turning his attention away from himself and his circumstances. And to the god. Who is listening to the voice? The sound of his voice. Who is the same god? Who has taken his people through similar things, more difficult things.

Before. And there's a big transition there that our translators aren't sure. What to do with in verse 10. But we'll get there in a moment, but If god gives us difficulty to turn our hearts and our voices to him. We shouldn't paper it over easily. We shouldn't whitewash. It we shouldn't say.

Peace. Peace. Uh, where there is no peace. One of the one of the things that great distress of heart, That shows us is that we are not remembering god so much as we ought, we don't know him. So well as he as we ought and then we remember that our distress comes in his providence and so it's not just exposing to us that we don't remember him like we author know him like we ought but it comes in the providence of him who wants to increase our memory of him.

Of himself and he wants to increase our knowledge of himself. So, that job ends up doing what blessing god why? Because before all that stuff happened, his knowledge of god was like a rumor compared to a face-to-face chat. After all of that had happened. And so even the way that verse 1 concludes and he gave ear to me Well, in what way did he give ear to you?

Did he get you out of the situation? No. He increased my memory of him, he increased my knowledge of him. He shifted the proportion of my focus. From. What i am feeling and afraid of. To what i know about him. And can be sure of Well, this great distress comes in his inability to To sense god's presence.

He's? In the day of my trouble, i saw the Lord, my hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing You hold my eyelids open. My soul refused to be comforted. He's thinking about and he's consumed now with How his soul feels and in this context when he remembers god, he's troubled why?

Because god has done all these things for others, but why don't i feel like he's done it for me. And this is helpful because it reminds us that Our feelings are not. Morally neutral. Our feelings are either right or wrong, and he was he was having uh, wrong feelings.

And, As he cries out, he asks all of these horrible questions. And verses 7 through 9. Questions, that thankfully. His. Uh, his conclusion has to be That the answer to those things is no, well, the Lord cast off forever. No. Will he be favorable? Of course not has his mercy ceased for no.

That's his promised failed for him, just Think about the promise of god. Falling forever. Has god forgotten. You already say no. And then to be gracious, of course not. Has he an anger shut up? His tender mercies. Okay, so At first. His soul is refusing to be comforted. It's like, When you, when you come to someone who Uh may not be mature believer and the memory of who God is and what he has done is is little comfort of it.

Because they're focus is so much on themselves and their circumstances that facts about god don't matter so much as feeling that they have in the moment. And whatever you say about what god has done for his people in the past and what got, whether in the bible or in history or in, you know, Anecdotes that you can give them from your own life for other people's lives.

It just bothers them more because he's not doing that for me. Is how they feel about it. The fact of the matter is, even believers like asap here. Fall into thinking and feeling that way. And so it's actually a mercy of god, isn't it while he's so focused on his own feelings.

That god didn't let The distress, go away easily. So that, that Uh, that weakness in his soul that That area that he still needed to grow in, sanctification and holiness would be exposed. In fact, he starts crying aloud with his voice in verse 1, but he gets to the point.

In verse 4 that he's unable to speak anymore. He remembers when he used to sing and it's probably not a the song of wailing. In verse verse 6. He remembers knights when he was doing the right thing. When he had a He wasn't able to fall asleep, or whatever reason and it just gave opportunity to be like all in silos on the jail singing, the phrases of god.

Maybe even psalms that had already been written. But that just bothers him more because this night is not like this those nights. And we should be prepared, then our anticipate. If? We have evidence in the psalms of those who have had Periods of their walk with the lord that have been sweet and close and fellowship.

And if you're laying on your bed and you're not falling asleep, you Seeing the praise of god thankful for his mercy during the day, anticipating another day of mercy tomorrow. The way we all want to be when we're falling asleep, the way we pray. At the end of the day together, that god would help us to fall asleep.

But sometimes the lord takes those who have gone through healthy and happy seasons like that through dark. And difficult seasons. Depressed seasons. Seasons in which If they give lip to, What their souls are really saying. Ask dreadful questions like versus seven through nine. And yet. It's so, Uh, it's so dreadful so painful.

That you can't continue that way. And that's the transition. In verse 10. I said, this is my anguish. And then the the translators add but i will remember the years of the right hand of the most high. So, There's a choice here either. I focus on myself on my experience.

In which right now for him, there's just pain. Or. I focus on. The most high and what does he have? He has the years of his right hand and so there's eternity and there's power there. And he remembers that. Um, first of all, Uh, god's work is right on schedule.

And the end of that work, is already determined. And second of all, Uh, he is not struggling. With my circumstances, the way i am struggling with my circumstances. Uh, they are not just the years of the most high, they are the years of the right hand. Of the most high and he remembers things like the flood.

And he remembers things like the red sea. And he remembers even. The dreadful storms and earthquakes. And, Well, nuts. Earthquakes here. Um, the depths are, trembling need to remember the dreadful storm that did. What? Well, it raised Noah's Ark and noah and his family. In it. Up above the death and destruction.

The storm saved, Noah the one that killed the rest of the world. And he remembers even the strong east wind, Which almost certainly wasn't just a wind. Is a great storm, so great. That when storm meets sea that storm one? And god used it to. To create a path in the midst of the sea.

The people of god couldn't see that path beforehand. What can they see? They can see that they were pinned with the entire egyptian army on. On the one side and a sea of death on the other side. How will god get me out of this? You don't actually need to know the answer to that question.

God knows the answer for that question. And sometimes. God's. If i could say it, reverently gps is set to go straight across the sea. That's where his path was. And he led his people like a flock. A flock of sheep. Not yeah. Antelopes being hunted by lion on a Planet earth or something like that.

He was taking care of his people the whole time. And so, Uh, we remember that god's. Uh, god's Time has length, eternity is too long for us to appreciate as power. Is two great. For us to estimate. We can't know. The the greatness of his power. Nothing is too hard for him.

And his ways are too wise to complex. For us to evaluate, we can't analyze. How things are going to go because those things, Are known to god. And so, when he turns his attention from himself, The english that he has to, who the lord is. The works of the lord, verse 11, the wonders of the lord verse 11.

Determined to meditate to tell himself now not complaining of his current circumstances, but to speak to himself of what god has done before. And God's way is holiness and who is so great as god. He has the god, who does wonders Well, if he is the god who does wonders then, is it any wonder?

That he would put you in a situation that if he gets you out of it, it would be a wonder. For god to do wonders, he One of the things that he does for his people, Is he brings us through situations in, which is wonderful that he carried us through it.

You don't have the wonder of the crossing of the red sea. Do you? Unless you have a people who are pinned, And the people who are pinned and in the middle of the night before they wake up in the morning, and there's that path in front of them, through the sea to be led like a flock now, They have the egyptian army in front of them, they have the red sea behind them and they have one of the worst storms that that has ever been on earth above them.

And god uses that to save them. And so when you start meditating on who God is and what he has done, And then, of course, the greatest wonder of all The wonder of god becoming a man. The wonder of god himself. Suffering wrath. And the person of jesus christ.

On the cross. The wonder of the resurrection. The wonder of the ascension. The wonder that human flesh. It's on the throne of glory. The wonder that the sky will open again one day. And our lord will appear. Returning and judgment. You see future wonders are a certain with goddess past wonders.

Sometimes the only thing. That we perceive of god in our circumstances, is that he hears our voice. And that we have his word. And we're unable to see. Any other good thing? Because all of the data of the situation feels dreadful to us. But still, he hears our voice.

And we have his word. And one of the ways he answers is by directing us back to his word, So that we will remember his wonders. So that we'll remember his works. And instead of saying, What situation was so horrible as my situation. Sure. God did all of those other things for all those other people, But this is what he's doing to me.

We don't say What's a situation that said that is our situation we say? Is so great to god. As our god. And, Sometimes it's all we have. But all the time. That's all we need. Let's pray. Our father in heaven. Please help us. I read a psalm like this and i realized, How comfortable?

And easy. Your providence has been with us so far and yet. Knowing that you are good to us. And that bringing your people through situations like this, as one of the ways in which You are good to us. I tremble to think. About where we are spiritually and Our ability to direct our attention from ourselves and to you.

Pray that your spirit would give us that habit that discipline of meditating Upon your word. Who you are, what you have done. The greatness. Of those things,

the greatness. Of what you will do, the greatness of what you are doing. Grant to us, we pray that that habit of Thinking and upon and remembering you in the midst of our circumstances.

Lest when the time comes. We not have. The ability. To. Cry out with our voice and reach out to you until we can't talk. To come to the moment of crisis, where Our focus on ourselves is so painful. That we would, then. Of necessity turning to remembering you instead.

Oh lord. Give to us what we need. That we would be able to make that turn by your grace when we come to it. And when we come to a situation like that, give us what we need then. And don't let us be those who Continue down into despair.

So we pray that you would give us real faith. In you in in In christ. That we would live by that faith. Blessed to us, the the psalm we pray. We ask it in jesus name, amen.