



## PSALM 80

### Call Out to God

This is Holly with Presence Point. Welcome to our *Psalms for Shepherds* series. Today, we're in *Psalm 80*, a psalm of Asaph begging God to restore His chosen people to Himself. The people of Israel had, once again, been disobedient and the Lord was now angry with them. One commentator noted that God's anger smoldered like a fire about to erupt and consume them!

You can hear the desperateness of that position, in this song that Asaph wrote to plead with God on the Israelites' behalf. In just 19 verses, the psalmist asked God to "restore," return the people to His favor, or turn back to them, four times. When I read this psalm, it felt like Asaph was deeply pleading on the people's behalf. In fact, he began his plea by asking God to "give ear to him," to pay attention, to listen to him. He clearly wanted God's attention from the start of this song and wanted to assure God was listening.

Please join me in this narrated reading of *Psalm 80*.

*Restore Us, O God*

*To the choirmaster: according to Lilies. A Testimony. Of Asaph, a Psalm.*

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,  
you who lead Joseph like a flock.

You who are enthroned upon the cherubim; shine forth.

<sup>2</sup> Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh,  
stir up your might [or God's power]  
and come to save [or rescue] us!

<sup>3</sup> Restore us, O God; [or return us, O God, to our former state of blessing and fellowship with You]  
let your face shine [or brighten toward us], that we may be saved!

<sup>4</sup> O Lord God of hosts,  
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?

<sup>5</sup> You have fed them with the bread of tears  
and given them tears to drink in full measure.

<sup>6</sup> You make us an object of contention for our neighbors [or derision, literally the shaking of heads at them],

and our enemies laugh among themselves [or mock, scoff, or ridicule the Jews]

<sup>7</sup> Restore us, O God of hosts [or turn back to us, O God];  
let your face shine, that we may be saved!

<sup>8</sup> You brought a vine out of Egypt;  
you drove out the nations and planted it. [Here Asaph is using the metaphor of a vine to describe God's Chosen people, by saying 'You brought us of Egypt and you even drove out other nations to plant us in the Promised Land!' It's like Asaph is reminding God, although He hasn't forgotten, of all that He had done for His people, and Asaph is saying, in human terms, 'Look, Lord, let's make sure You don't lose all that You've invested in us. Please turn back to us. Don't give up on us. Restore us to You!']

<sup>9</sup> You cleared the ground for it;  
it took deep root and filled the land [meaning He cleared all the people and what was on the land out of it and off of it to permit the Israelites to begin to re-build their nation at a location that was there's. And they had done that. In fact, they had taken deep root in that new land and had filled it].

<sup>10</sup> The mountains were covered with its shade,  
the mighty cedars with its branches.

<sup>11</sup> It sent out its branches to the sea  
and its shoots to the River [meaning, the Euphrates River].

<sup>12</sup> Why then have you broken down its walls,  
so that all who pass along the way pluck [or pick] its fruit [or take all the good that we've invested here]?

<sup>13</sup> The boar from the forest ravages it,  
and all that move in the field feed on it.

<sup>14</sup> Turn again, O God of hosts [or turn back to us, God]!  
Look down from heaven, and see;  
have regard for this vine [or Your chosen people],

<sup>15</sup> the stock that your right hand planted,  
and for the son whom you made strong for yourself [or the original's inhabitant's descendants that God had blessed and prospered for His purposes].

<sup>16</sup> They [meaning their enemies] have burned it with fire; they have cut it down;  
may they perish at the rebuke [or the threat] of your face!

<sup>17</sup> But let your hand be on the man of your right hand [God's chosen people],  
the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!

<sup>18</sup> [Then, in verse 18, Asaph makes a promise to God. He said,] Then, we shall not turn back from you [in other words, "If You'll do these things that I'm asking, God, we will have learned our lesson and will repent, and we will turn back to you, Lord. I promise."];

give us life [Asaph goes on to say] and we will call upon your name!

<sup>19</sup> Restore us [or bring us back], O Lord [or Jehovah] God of hosts!  
Let your face shine, that we may be saved!

It's so interesting that in this last verse, the psalmist invokes God's covenant name, Jehovah. He was appealing to the covenant that God had made with His people and was asking God to be faithful to forgive His people as they called on Him and confessed their sins.

This psalm of repentance clearly communicates Asaph's desire as priest to bring the people and God back together again which is what every shepherd should want for his or her flock whether that flock includes the parishioners of a church or the children of a family.

When we realize and recognize our responsibility to shepherd well; to influence and impact others in a manner that brings them closer to the Father. When we see them wandering like sheep without a shepherd, our desire should be to see them restored to communion with our God. And, often, crying out to God on their behalf is right where we must find ourselves much like Asaph was crying out to Jehovah on behalf of the people of Israel.

This, as every psalm is rich with meaning, so it's hard to quickly pass over the psalmist's use of the term "vine" for the Jews especially since it's the same image Jesus used to describe Himself in John, chapter 15. Because it took me by surprise when I realized that Asaph was using this same term, I dug deeper and then it made so much sense. Here's why: As long as the Jews obeyed the Lord, the vine grew and covered more and more of the land, just like us when we're obedient. The more we obey the Father, the more we heed His voice and follow His Word, the more of a relationship we have with Him, and the more we'll grow!

And, of course, the opposite is true, as well. When the Jews disobeyed, God withdrew His protection and allowed the enemy to enter the land and run the vineyard. Poor decisions, poor actions, result in negative consequences whether from God or others.

One commentator points out that "God planted the vine (or the nation of Israel) in the promised land and He alone can protect it and deliver it from the enemies that He had permitted to come into the land and destroy it. God had treated the people like a favored son, and just as Jacob had laid his right hand of blessing on Ephraim, rather than first-born Manasseh, they did not deserve His blessing, but in His grace He bestowed it."

There is so much from this short psalm that we can apply to our lives as shepherd leaders, but what struck me most is how very often we, as shepherd leaders, can withhold good from those to whom grace would supply it, believing (in our limited understanding) that it's the right thing to do because that person has not earned it.

Oh, how often shepherd leader, we do not deserve the grace the Father, the Good, Great, and Chief Shepherd has bestowed on us. So dear fellow under-shepherd, this is the time to ask the question: Are there circumstances in my leadership journey where I'm withholding blessing on those I influence or impact, those I'm shepherding because I think they don't deserve it? Is it because you think their sin against you is too great, their debt to you too large to forgive, the hurt they caused you too painful to move past?

I would encourage you to read through *Psalm 80* with that circumstance in mind. Think of how disobedient the Israelites had become, how often they walked away from God even when, again and again, He supplied what they needed, literally and directly, including ultimately, forgiveness.

Then, take a moment and cry out to God on behalf of that person that came to mind just as Asaph cried out on behalf of the Jews and explore what God lays on your heart at that moment. Maybe it's forgiveness. Maybe it's blessing. Most likely, it will be grace.

Thank you for joining me this week. May you live deeply into your calling as shepherd in the lives of those you influence.