



PSALM 77

What To Do in Times of Trouble

This is Holly with Presence Point and welcome to our *Psalms for Shepherds* series. Today we're in *Psalms 77*, another psalm of Asaph that is written to remind God's people what to do in times of trouble. When everything around us seems to be falling apart in the midst of grief and pain and absolute despair, at a time when comfort seems elusive and we are speechless with worry or anxiety, when we're attacked whether from Satan and his minions. or business partners or competitors, or your coworkers or from within your own family. No matter how difficult a time you're having even when you think God is not listening or is not working those are the times that Asaph intended for the Israelites to be encouraged by this psalm. May it encourage you today.

Psalms 77

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.

Selah [or stop and contemplate, reflect]

⁴ You hold my eyelids open;
I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

⁵ I consider the days of old,
the years long ago.

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

Then my spirit made a diligent search:

⁷ "Will the Lord spurn forever,
and never again be favorable?

⁸ Has his steadfast love forever ceased?
Are his promises at an end for all time?

⁹ Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Has he, in anger, shut up his compassion?"

Selah

¹⁰ Then I said, "I will appeal to this,
to the years of the right hand of the Most High."
¹¹ I will remember the deeds of the Lord;
yes, I will remember your wonders of old.
¹² I will ponder all your work,
and meditate on your mighty deeds.
¹³ Your way, O God, is holy.
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. Selah
¹⁶ When the waters saw you, O God,
when the waters 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 unseen.
²⁰ You led your people like a flock
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Asaph spends the first nine verses of this psalm describing just how distraught he is and then, it's like he pauses half way in verse 9 or so, he catches the worry and self-dependence that he's exhibiting, and he thinks (this is what I feel he's saying to himself), "Wait a minute. I'm going to remind Him of his righteous right hand, just how virtuous and honorable and moral He is. I'm going to appeal to Him to be the same God right now. I'm going to remember what He's done in the past. I'm going to ponder all of God's works. And, in fact, I'm going to meditate on His works, on what He's done."

Then, after the psalmist did that, he said, "Okay, wait a minute. What do I know? I know that God is holy, perfect, righteous, He's right in what He does. He literally works wonders. In fact, my people, my ancestors have seen Him do exactly that."

And, as Asaph changes his focus, he's reminded of how God parted the Red Sea for his ancestors. There they were fleeing Egypt and the bond of slavery and they get as far as an ocean, not a lake or a pond or a river, the Red Sea

Can't you just picture it? They're marching out of Egypt with their belongings, even with the jewelry the Egyptians have willingly turned over to them. and they face a roadblock, an actual sea! They stop. They turn around and see what's coming in the distance. This huge cloud of dust caused by Pharaoh's chariots and horses. And they turn back around and stare at what's ahead of them. At that moment an ocean of water.

And what did they do then? They watched God move. God ordered his creation to go against the grain, to do what no body of water does naturally; to split and separate, forming two walls of water. And that wasn't enough, He went a step further and commanded the water to leave the earth under the sea rather than mushy sand or muddy earth, His people walked between the two walls of water on dry ground.

At that point, Asaph turned away from looking to himself and his own misery. And turned toward God. He moved from self-focus to God-focus. Even the pronouns he used in this psalm, change from "I" to "you" at that point. And he saw more clearly. So much more clearly that he saw how God acted as Shepherd to His people just as Moses and Aaron had done in the wilderness for 40 years. By God's grace, Moses and Aaron had provided what the people of Israel needed, they protected them from harm, and they were present for them and with them - never leaving even when they wanted to, when the whining and complaining over the lack of water or not enough meat or too much of the same meat persisted, Moses and Aaron continued to lead God's people.

They demonstrated their commitment to the Father and His call on their lives for that period of time. Through this psalm, Asaph demonstrated to both the people of Israel and to us today the important of looking upward instead of inward, acknowledging God's power, might, holiness, and sovereignty. Remembering, pondering, and meditating on the fact that God's ways often run counter to ours. For the Israelites, it was parting the Red Sea and, at another point, parting the Jordan River. They could look back to moments like that and know that God could make the earth tremble and shake without ever stepping a foot on this earth. As one author said, "He works in defiance of what our puny minds can predict." We see it demonstrated throughout Scripture and the many whose lives are documented within the pages of His holy Word. And we can look to the Good Shepherd, to the Lamb of God, and see what He did for us on the cross, the utmost instance of His working in defiance to what we mere humans can predict. In the Old Testament, His way is through the sea. In the New Testament, through the cross.

As the *Crossway Devotional Psalter* tells us, "The gracious provision of God confounds us even as it delivers us." Dear shepherd leader, is there somewhere in your life, maybe even in your leadership journey where you need to be "confounded" by God's power or might? Where you need Him to

absolutely mystify you in how He works? And show you that He's there working righteously? Well, He can do that. And, although he does not always let us in on what He's doing, there are certainly times that He does, when He knows it's best for us to know, to see, to experience the mystery of Who He is.

But, maybe, first you need to stop and move from self-focus to God-focus, from inward to Godward and remember as Asaph said, ponder and meditate on where in the past God has proven Himself faithful, with His righteous right hand. Then, recite those instances back to Him like Asaph did, thank Him for those instances, remind Him of them (even though He's never forgotten). Write them down. Build an altar of remembrance and worship. And ask God to help you trust that He will do it (whatever the 'it' is that He knows is best) again. May you live deeply into your calling this week.