

Why Is God So Far Away?

Psalm 10



Main idea: Although God may feel far away when affliction comes, we must remember that He is our King and Advocate who never leaves nor forsakes His people.

A Prayer for the Overthrow of the Wicked.

Why do You stand afar off, O LORD?

Why do You hide *Yourself* in times of trouble?

² In pride the wicked hotly pursue the afflicted;

Let them be caught in the plots which they have devised.

³ For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire,

And the greedy man curses *and* spurns the LORD.

⁴ The wicked, in the haughtiness of his countenance, 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 adversaries, he snorts at them.

⁶ He says to himself, "I will not be moved;

Throughout all generations I will not be in adversity."

⁷ His mouth is full of curses and deceit and oppression;

Under his tongue is mischief and wickedness.

⁸ He sits in the lurking places of the villages;

In the hiding places he kills the innocent;

His eyes stealthily watch for the unfortunate.

⁹ He lurks in a hiding place as a lion in his lair;

He lurks to catch the afflicted;

He catches the afflicted when he draws him into his net.

¹⁰ He crouches, he bows down,

And the unfortunate fall by his mighty ones.

¹¹ He says to himself, "God has forgotten;

He has hidden His face; He will never see it."

¹² Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up Your hand.

Do not forget the afflicted.

¹³ Why has the wicked spurned God?

He has said to himself, "You will not require *it*."

¹⁴ You have seen *it*, for You have beheld mischief and vexation to take it into Your hand.

The unfortunate commits *himself* to You;

You have been the helper of the orphan.

¹⁵ Break the arm of the wicked and the evildoer,

Seek out his wickedness until You find none.

¹⁶ The LORD is King forever and ever;

Nations have perished from His land.

¹⁷ O LORD, You have heard the desire of the humble;

You will strengthen their heart, You will incline Your ear

¹⁸ To vindicate the orphan and the oppressed,
So that man who is of the earth will no longer cause terror.

Introduction:

Last week, we mentioned that one of the great things about The Book of Psalms is how it, more than any other book in the Bible, teaches us about God in His fullness. It shows us God from many different vantage points, vividly displaying all His various attributes to help us understand who He is. But the Psalms don't just show us who God is; they also show us who we are. The Psalms, more than any other book, show people—and in particular, God's people—in all of our various spiritual, mental, and emotional states. The Psalms are *"an anatomy of all the parts of the soul."*¹

The Psalms are not cookie-cutter praise hymns; they are brutally honest songs and prayers that convey the joy, faith, worry, pain, suffering, and the hope of real people—people who battled with the same sins as we battle today; people who struggled with the same sufferings we suffer today; and people who ask the same questions that we ask today ("Why, Lord?, How long, O Lord, Where are You, Lord?"). And these questions are hard, but they are honest. They reflect the honest emotions of God's people when trouble, affliction, or persecution comes, and God's deliverance is delayed.

Our text today poses one of those hard questions—Why, Lord?

- **Psalm 10:1**—Why do You stand afar off, O LORD? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?

Why, O Lord? Why do you allow the wicked to prosper at the expense of Your people? Why do Christians in northern Nigeria have to worry about whether or not their village will be the next one burned to the ground by Islamic extremists? Why do my brothers and sisters in North Korea have to worry about whether or not they will be the next ones arrested and put into prison camps with the thousands of other Christians already there? Why do I suffer affliction at the hands of others when I try to walk faithfully with the Lord where I am? Why do you allow this God? Where are You? Why are You so far away?

And although most Christians have felt this way before, it's not a question we usually bring up in the company of other Christians, is it? We don't want to appear weak in our faith; we don't want others to think that we doubt God. And so, we keep this feeling to ourselves. But it's there, nonetheless. Well, this is nothing new—Job felt it, Elijah felt it, Jeremiah felt it, and here, the ancient psalmist felt it.

But here is what those saints of old understood, and we must come to understand, as well—Although God may feel far away when affliction comes, we must remember that He is our King and Advocate who never leaves nor forsakes His people.

Context:

You may have noticed that Psalm 10 has a lot in common with Psalm 9—both speak of injustice and wickedness in the world and call on God to act. In fact, because of linguistic and contextual reasons, many scholars think these two psalms were originally one long psalm, meant to be read as one. Be that as it may,

¹ John Calvin, Commentary on Psalms, Vol.1, ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom08.vi.html

what we have as Psalm 10 does form its own unit—dealing with this question of why God seems to be standing afar off, and in the end, answering that question.

We aren't told who wrote this Psalm or its exact reason for composition. We only know why it was written in a general sense. Verse 1 tells us it was written in *"times of trouble."* Well, that shouldn't be hard to relate to in our own day and situations, should it? Have you experienced *"times of trouble?"* Are you experiencing *"times of trouble?"* Then you and I need to pay attention to see how this psalmist deals with these *"times of trouble"* when God feels far away.

Exposition:

A. The question asked—the cry of the afflicted (v.1)

¹Why do You stand afar off, O LORD? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?

Why does the psalmist begin like this? Why would you ever begin a song like this? One, because this is how the psalmist truly felt; and two, because he knows this is how God's people often feel. We don't know what his particular "time of trouble" was, other than he was afflicted by the wicked. He is in a distressful situation in which he needs God's help. But apparently, God hasn't given that direct help yet. And this is confusing to the man of God. He calls out to Him using the covenant name of God, "Yahweh," my God—You who are for me, a believer in You—why aren't You helping me? Where are You?

Imagine a man who has enlisted a bodyguard to accompany him wherever he goes. The bodyguard is always by his side when things are safe and well. But as soon as trouble or danger comes, the bodyguard is nowhere to be found. The man is left to fend for himself against those stronger than him.

This is how the psalmist feels. It feels like God is standing far away; even hiding Himself in this situation. Now, the psalmist is not theologically ignorant. He knows his theology. He knows that God is omnipresent—He is present everywhere all the time. What he's asking, then, is, "Why, God, are You acting like You're not here? I know You're a God who rescues the innocent and tramples the wicked, but You're not doing it. Why not? I need You now!"

Do you ever feel this way? Be honest. Most of us have at some point, or we likely will at some point. We feel like God has abandoned us for the time being; like He has gone off on some other business and left us to fend for ourselves, and we can't. Or we feel like He simply doesn't care. We're being overwhelmed. And we ask, "Why, do You stand afar off, O Lord?" The disciples asked this of Jesus. Read Mark 4:35-41.

We think we know when the Lord should act, and when He doesn't act the way we want, when we want, we accuse Him of not caring, or of forgetting about us. But what would Jesus say to that? *"Why are you afraid? How is it that you have no faith?" (Mark 4:40)*

Does it mean we are faithless if we cry out in our affliction, "Lord, where are You?" No, in fact, that very cry testifies to the fact that we believe in a God who helps. But it does mean we need to pause, and rather than going on to accuse God of something, we move as the psalmist does to consider where our affliction comes from and what we know about God.

B. The boastful pride and evil deeds of the wicked (vv.2-15)

1. The boastful pride of the wicked (vv.2-6)

The psalmist explains why it feels like God has hidden Himself—because he sees, and likely personally experiences, God's people suffering at the hands of the wicked. He describes the wicked as actively, or "hotly," pursuing the afflicted. They are like a fire rushing in upon the godly—singeing their garments as they chase them down. And notice the attitude of the wicked as they hotly pursue the godly—they do so "in pride."



This word for pride (נָּאָץ) is used in the Old Testament almost exclusively to describe two things:

- God's majesty (*Deut.33:26, 29; Ps.68:34*)
- Man's arrogance (*Ps.31:19, 24; 36:12; 73:6; Jer.48:29*)

What we see in every case the word is used is that it is always very positive when describing God and always very negative when describing humans. Pride, therefore, is sin because it is man trying to usurp God's majesty and glory. Man "wears pride like a necklace" (*Ps.73:6*), showing off what he thinks he has done or accomplished. We fail to see that we are "but men" (*Ps.9:20*).

Pride is a root sin lying underneath so many other sins.

Richard Hooker—"Pride is a vice which cleaveth so fast unto the hearts of men, that if we were to strip ourselves of all faults one by one, we should undoubtedly find it the very last and hardest to put off."²

What does God think about man's pride?

- **Isaiah 13:11**—Thus I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless.
- **Zephaniah 3:11**—In that day you will feel no shame because of all your deeds by which you have rebelled against Me; for then I will remove from your midst your proud, exulting ones, and you will never again be haughty on My holy mountain.

Pride is a root cause of so much of our sin—and at its core, pride de-gods God, and puts ourselves in His place.

Notice what the pride of the wicked looks like:

- a. Their pride gives rise to greed. (v.3)

³For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire, and the greedy man curses and spurns the LORD.

Their own heart—which is bent toward selfish gain (greed)—is their guide, rather than the Lord.

² Richard Hooker, as quoted in *The Treasury of David* (Charles Spurgeon), biblestudytools.com/commentaries/treasury-of-david/psalms-10-2.html

- b. Their pride gives rise to insolence toward God. (vv.4, 11)

In their haughtiness, the wicked do not seek the Lord. It is not that they are true atheists, who don't believe God exists. It is that they are practical atheists—they don't want God. They don't care what He has said or commanded. In fact, they live as if there is no God. They are their own moral compass. They live as if they are their own god—they worship themselves. They take no thought of His will or of His judgment of sin. They have rejected God.

- c. Their pride gives rise to self-deception. (vv.5-6)

His pride is encouraged by his prospering in the world. He thinks that material prosperity equals security. He has no fear of the judgments of God—to him, they are far off, out of sight, out of mind. They have no bearing on how he lives his life. He “snorts” at his adversaries, sure of himself and his own strength. But he is self-deceived. Verse 6 says He tells himself that nothing and no one will move him. He is doing well now and will continue to do so. Trouble will not come his way.

Application:

We can so easily fall into this kind of self-deception. If things are going well with us financially, on the job, and we're able to buy a house or car or pay them off, we think we've got it made. And even Christians can allow themselves to drift from God, thinking there is no longer any need to depend on Him. Though we likely don't actually say, “Thanks for your help God, but I'm good now; I'll get back to you when things get rough again,” practically, that's exactly what some end up doing. When we do that, we think just like the wicked, the ungodly, the practical atheist. We must guard ourselves against that mindset. Whether or not we are doing well in the world materially, our mindset must always be one of utter dependence on God through Jesus Christ by the power and aid of the Holy Spirit.

So, we see that the pride of the wicked gives rise to a mind and heart full of greed for material gain, insolence toward God and His Word, and an ever-increasing self-deception of security for their future.

Now, how do you think that mindset is going to affect what that person does and how they act toward others? David tells us in verses 7-11 that the boastful pride of the wicked leads to evil deeds.

2. The evil deeds of the wicked (vv.7-11)

In verse 7, the psalmist says that with words, the wicked unleash curses, lies, and oppression. With words, he devises mischief and wickedness. He plans schemes to hurt or take advantage of others in order to gain money, status, or wealth.

Verses 8-10 describe the wicked in three different pictures:

- Verse 8—a murderer in the shadows of the village, waiting to ambush the innocent, the unfortunate, or helpless
- Verse 9a—a lion crouching in his hiding place, waiting to pounce on his prey
- Verse 9b—a hunter waiting to spring his net on his prize

All of this together is a picturesque way of describing the world the psalmist lived in and the world we live in. The world has always been, and will always be, in opposition to God and to His people. Jesus said:

- **John 15:18**—If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.
- **Mark 13:13**—You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

The world is opposed to God and opposed to the Gospel of Christ; therefore, don't be surprised that the world is opposed to you simply for living for Christ.

- **1 Peter 4:3-5**—For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. ⁴ In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you; ⁵ but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

The question is, then, "What can we do? What recourse do we have?" What we have is prayer.

C. The desperate prayer of the afflicted (*vv.12-15*)

- **Psalms 10:12**—Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up Your hand. Do not forget the afflicted.
- **Psalms 10:15**—Break the arm of the wicked and the evildoer, seek out his wickedness until You find none.

These prayers together are saying the same thing—"O Lord, help Your afflicted people and put a stop to the boastful pride and evil deeds of the wicked!"

Why should He? The psalmist tells us why in verses 13-14. In these verses, he gives us the basis for his appeal, and these can be the basis of our appeal—our prayer—as well. It consists of two things: 1) the honor of God and 2) the compassion of God.

1. The honor of God (*vv.13-14a*)

¹³ Why has the wicked spurned God? He has said to himself, "You will not require it."

The wicked are living as practical atheists; as if God doesn't exist. They think, talk, and live as though God does not judge. They are slighting God of the honor that belongs to Him, and that is a serious thing. In fact, this is one of the main reasons for God's wrath and judgment.

- **Romans 1:18, 21**—the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness....²¹ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

The psalmist is praying to God to act on behalf of His own honor, for unlike the wicked, the psalmist knows that God sees exactly what is happening.

¹⁴ You have seen it, for You have beheld mischief and vexation to take it into Your hand.

2. The mercy of God (vv.14b-c)

¹⁴ The unfortunate commits himself to You; You have been the helper of the orphan.

He knows that many of the “unfortunate/poor/needy” that are suffering at the hands of the wicked, including himself, have committed themselves to the Lord. They are believers. They are God’s people. They are the ones who do honor His name and seek Him. They have committed themselves to the Lord because they know Him to be God, and to be a good God, and to be a merciful God.

And how do they know this? Because of God’s Word and past actions. He knows that the Lord has been the helper of the orphan. God has a track record of helping His people when they are in need.

- **Deuteronomy 10:18**—He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing.
- **Psalms 146:7-9**—Who executes justice for the oppressed; Who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free. ⁸ The LORD opens the eyes of the blind; The LORD raises up those who are bowed down; The LORD loves the righteous; ⁹ The LORD protects the strangers; He supports the fatherless and the widow, But He thwarts the way of the wicked.

When the Israelites were suffering as slaves in Egypt, they cried out to the Lord their God for help, and we are told that, *“their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God. So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them”* (Ex.2:23-25).

During the time of the Judges, God’s people were repeatedly beset by and oppressed by their enemies because of their own sin. And yet, when God’s people cried out to Him for help, time and time again:

- **Judges 2:18**—When the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them.

This is God’s MO—He is merciful to the afflicted. And so, we need to learn to pray like this—to base our prayers on the truths we know about God. God, act to honor Your name and act according to Your Word and character.

D. The question answered—the confidence of the afflicted (vv.16-18)

Now, having meditated on the deeds of the wicked, and prayed to God for help, the psalmist comes back to his opening question: *“Why do You stand afar off, O LORD? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?”* And he answers his own question.

Is God really standing far off and hiding Himself? No, that is not the God he knows; that is not the God we know. The God we know, the God that is proclaimed in the Scriptures, the God who redeemed us for His own through the blood of His own Son, is hope for afflicted believers. Though it can feel like the

world has turned itself upside down, so that the wicked prosper at the expense of the godly, God is here, and He is a very present help in trouble.

God will act because He has both the power/authority to stop the wicked and the compassion to help the afflicted.

1. The power/authority of God to stop the wicked (v.16)

Though it can feel like anarchy in the world, the psalmist proclaims Yahweh to still be the King on His throne. He is *"King forever and ever."* What a comfort to the afflicted believer! Nothing happens apart from His sovereignty. Although we don't always know why we are being afflicted, or why God delays deliverance, we know that He is sovereign and that He is working even this for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. We know that He wants to use this affliction to make us more like His Son, Jesus. He is the sovereign King of all the earth, and He will not always allow the wicked to prosper—either in this world or the next, He will judge.

2. The compassion of the Lord to help the afflicted (vv.17-18)

The psalmist also reminds himself and us that God has the compassion to help the afflicted—especially those most vulnerable (the orphans and the afflicted). He is not indifferent to the sufferings of His people. He has particular care for His children who are subjected to the schemes and wickedness of man.

He has *"heard the desire of the humble"* (v.17a), and that is a pleasing sound to Him—the sound of humble trust and dependence on Him. In His compassion, the Lord will strengthen the hearts of His people as He inclines His ear to their prayer and their desires. And though we don't know when, we can be assured that one day God will vindicate His people completely, so that man can no longer cause terror.

Conclusion:

And don't we know this to be true? For in an ultimate sense, our affliction is not from men, but from our own sin. Sin is a slave master, sin makes us miserable, and sin brings death. But God, even when we didn't realize we were miserable slaves to sin, felt compassion for us. He sent His Son, Jesus, to help us, to free us, to save us from our affliction.

And in saving us, Jesus is the only One who could truly ever ask God, "Why do You stand afar off?" For as Jesus hung on the cross, the Father turned His face away from His Son as He bore the weight of God's wrath for our sins on Himself, crying out, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* (Matt.27:46). But Jesus knew that the Father hid Himself, then for a short time, so that He would never have to do it again for those who trust in Jesus.

Therefore, in our present or future afflictions, He is our Helper through Jesus Christ.

- **Romans 8:31-32**—What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

Let us all, then, find hope and confidence in our afflictions, knowing that our God reigns and has eternal compassion for His afflicted children.

Amen.

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