

A Song that Endures
Psalm 80
June 28, 2026

I spent the week around a few hundred teenagers. And I'm glad to report that many of them listen to old music. This wasn't *just* something I noticed. In fact, independently from one another, two adults came up to me and mentioned it—one a pastor, the other a student at Southern. Even the songs that played over the speakers while we played games were songs I would've sung decades ago. And that's to say nothing of hundreds of students belting out "Be Thou My Vision" three times just last Tuesday.

Now, to speak broadly, this is not *just* our students, nor is it just teenagers from Reformed and Baptist churches. Listening to older music is actually a trend among Gen Z. In fact, earlier this month I read that out of every three songs streamed on Spotify, one was at *least* a decade old. And out of every six, one was at least *two* decades old.¹

There's a lot more we could say about that, but I bring it up to begin our thinking on *why* it is that certain songs endure. If a song is older, and is *still* being listened to or sung, it's because that particular song has outlasted other songs. And not just a few, but tens of millions of challengers, thousands upon thousands of new entries every single week.

In today's text, we consider an old song. Obviously, it's in a genre *unlike* all the others. And it's endured for theological reasons. But I think as we consider it, we might see the reasons *why* it was written, and why thousands of years later it's not close to "out of date."

1. A Prayer for Restoration in the Present

Let me begin by saying this song isn't *merely* a song, it's a prayer they sang. Wednesday morning at Southern, one of the speakers—Brian Payne—actually taught on prayer. And in that sermon, he quoted a Corrie Ten Boom line that I'd not heard before. She wrote this, "The wonderful thing about praying is that you leave a world of *not* being able to do something and enter God's realm where everything is possible."²

I bring up that quote because the first few verses of this Psalm certainly imply both truths. Hear verse 1: **Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up your might and come to save us!**

We're not going to spend a ton of time on background, but it's likely that this Psalm was composed *after* the invasion of the Assyrians in 722 BC, that which resulted in the fall of the northern kingdom—Israel.³ That's the context for this particular song. And like the last two Psalms we've considered—Psalm 74 and Psalm 77—you'll hear that it's a prayer of lament.⁴ Verse 4 includes a few notes you've heard before: **O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with Your people's prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in full measure. You have made us an object of contention for our neighbors, and our enemies laugh among themselves.**

¹ WSJ, "The Biggest Hits on Spotify Right Now are a Blast From the Past."

² Brian Payne, D3 Conference, 2026.

³ Alec Motyer, *Psalms by the Day*, 226; Christopher Ash, *The Psalms: A Christ-Centered Commentary*, 392. The three tribes mentioned in verse 2 point us to that conclusion.

⁴ Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Psalms*, 139.

I skip ahead to those verses to say that what the Psalmist, and God's people faced, was the kind of thing so devastating that solutions were not simple. It's the kind of thing Corrie Ten Boom was referencing when she said, "we leave a world of not being able to do something." This songwriter couldn't unbreak the glass of his country being conquered. He couldn't expel the Assyrians with a poem. All around him was calamity. God's people were being laughed at. And because of that, God's people wept.

In one sense, he was *not* able to do anything about his situation. But in the *midst* of that, in *that* present, he calls out to the One who is able. Again, verse 1 called Him **the Shepherd of Israel**. He'd led **Joseph like a flock**. What was meant for evil, God meant for good (Gen. 50). But it's not *merely* that He led that patriarch, later He'd led the Hebrews in victory. Verse 1 goes on to say that the Shepherd of Israel was **enthroned upon the cherubim**, likely referring to what we considered in one of *last* week's Psalms, that is, the ark of the covenant. And as Psalm 68 made clear, the Lord being enthroned upon the cherubim, going out in front of the people—*leading* them—repeatedly led to the enemies of God being scattered. So, it's not *merely* that He led a flock, He led them with strength and power. That's why verse 2 ends: **stir up your might and come to save us**. This is their prayer.

But, again, this prayer is *also* a song. And though not *all* songs have one of these, this particular song has a refrain. We'll see it in verse 3, *again* in verse 7, and then in the final verse—verse 19.

So, what is this refrain? Verse 3: **Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved**. I'll go ahead and prep you a bit, but one interesting thing about this particular refrain is that it actually develops. In other words, it's repetitive, but not word-for-word. In verse 7 a few words will be added. In verse 19 a few more words will be added.

But in each chorus, or refrain, there are three constituent parts. The first is a prayer for God to restore. The second is something of the *how* He might restore, that is, by causing His face to shine upon them. The third part is something of the effect of God making His face to shine upon them. By His restoring look, they might be saved.

As you might guess, it's important that we slow down a bit and think through this refrain. So, first, what does he mean by **restore us, O God?** The first thing we might say is that this request is *also* something of an admission. Some would translate it, "bring us back."⁵ Others might explain the request in these terms, "Cause us to return."⁶ As you can hear, it's something of a confession. They're admitting that the present circumstances are, at least partly, *their* fault. In fact, verse 18 includes a confession of their disloyalty, suggesting that spiritual realities either led to, or were *partly* to blame for, the obvious visible wreckage around them.⁷ So, they pray, **restore us, O God**.

Now, before we consider the second aspect of this refrain, we might go back in time a bit to Deuteronomy 31, a passage that predicts what would come to God's people. It's *also* a passage that sheds some light on the imagery here. And it happens to include Moses. Right before his death, the Lord said to him, **Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers. Then this people will rise and whore after the foreign gods among them in the land that they are entering, and they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them. Then my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide my face from them** (Deut. 31:16–17).

In that rewind, we can see that what came about in the history of Israel was something the Lord *knew* would come about. But, also, in *that* passage the Lord introduces us—in some sense—to

⁵ Motyer, 226.

⁶ Ash, 393.

⁷ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, TOTC, 320.

how He would respond to their turning away, their breaking of the covenant. And the imagery He uses to describe His response is a hidden face.

So, the Israelites *knew* they'd turned away. And they *knew* the consequences around them were due to that turning away. Recognizing that, maybe even admitting it, they pray the second aspect of this refrain, that He might cease hiding His face. Instead, they plead: **let Your face shine.**

And of course, to go back to Deuteronomy 31 wasn't far enough. Because *long* before that curse that accompanied their disobedience, the Lord told Moses and Aaron what the blessing of the covenant would be: **The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face to shine upon you** (Numb. 6:24-25). It's a benediction concerning the gaze of God, and all *that* entails—including His blessing and His favor. And they know that the restoration they seek would be brought about by the face of God shining upon them.

Briefly, the third aspect of this refrain unfolds something of the purpose of His restoring look. Namely, that **they might be saved.**

So, we've already read *some* of verses 4 to 6. They've been fed the bread of tears. They've drunk them in full measure. By the way, some would say the language of **full measure** is "by the quart."⁸ It's vivid language. The destruction around them was quite vivid. Devastation was their present reality. That's the picture verses 4 to 6 paint.

So, even though they had *just* said this in verse 3, they sing again in verse 7: **Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved!** It's the same refrain, but with an added descriptor of the God they call out to. As I mentioned, these refrains *develop*, so that the God of verse 3 is the **God of hosts** in verse 7. Within *Him* is a host of powers.⁹

They were not able. He was. Therefore, they looked to and depended upon him.

Brian Payne quoted Corrie Ten Boom more than once in that sermon on prayer, including this question she would've asked: is prayer our steering wheel, or is it our spare tire? Said another way: in whatever we face, does our praying indicate something of dependence?

In their present, they prayed for restoration.

And they did so based on what He'd *already* done.

2. A Prayer for Restoration Based on the Past (vv. 8-14)

Verse 8 might be the central reason why this Psalm fits into this particular series: **You brought a vine out of Egypt.**

Keep in mind that this is hundreds and hundreds of years after the Exodus. And yet, when the Psalmist prays for restoration, to the God he believes *can* restore, he brings up what happened way back in Egypt. It's the same move we saw in Psalm 74. It's the same move from last week in Psalm 77.¹⁰

And it's not *just* Psalm 74 or Psalm 77 that do this. This is something of the *modus operandi* for afflicted Hebrews. They grab the map and zoom out, so that they might remind themselves of the Lord's leading throughout history. Might we too beware of what could be called a myopic faith, that is, being too zoomed-in and therefore unable to see rightly. And instead, might we consider a timeline further back than the day of our birth. So that in our difficulty, we go back, not *just* to older songs, but to songs that sing of that which is old.

⁸ Kidner, 321.

⁹ Motyer, 227.

¹⁰ The Psalmist appealed to the years of the right hand of the Most High (77:10). And when the waters saw Him, they were afraid (77:16).

We should note, however, that in *this* case the Psalmist doesn't use sea monster imagery like Psalm 74 did, nor clouds, thunder, or the deep as Psalm 77 did. Instead, in *this* case, what came out of Egypt was a vine. According to the next clause in verse 8, God drove out the nations and *planted* this vine. Verse 9 continues the imagery: **You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land.**

Those of you that plant things know the necessity of prep work—in particular with the ground. Many of you have heard me talk about the tree in our front yard that was struck by lightning and had to be cut down a few years back. What you *haven't* heard is how much difficulty we've had getting stuff to grow where that stump was. We've planted grass twice. And twice it's done well, beautifully in fact—for a time.

So, this spring we decided to try something new, putting a flower bed where that tree was. But we'd concluded that *most* of the issue from the previous two failures was due to issues with the soil. So, Julie's dad drove down here, bringing lots of dirt from his dairy farm. And for much of two days we dug up the ground, put new dirt down, and then—and *only* then—we planted flowers.

A vine was brought out of Egypt. God cleared the ground and planted it. Verse 9 says it took deep root and filled the land. Because its end wasn't a small flower bed in East Memphis. Verse 10 describes what this vine became: **The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River.** Some have suggested that these four images—mountains, cedars, sea, and river—hint at the four points of the compass around the promised land. That is, the mountains are the hill country of Judah in the south, the cedars are the cedars of Lebanon in the north, the sea is the Mediterranean to the west, while the river (probably the Euphrates) is the eastern boundary.¹¹

Whether we take *that* approach or not, the scope of this growth is the point. Out of slavery, He brought a vine. After clearing the ground, the vine took deep root, and then grew to the point that *mountains* were covered with its shade. This is the imagery that describes the Hebrews' past. He'd looked upon His people. His face had shone upon them, taking them from chains in Egypt to blessing in Canaan.

And it's with *that* in mind that the Psalmist then asks, somewhat bewildered, in verse 12: **Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it.** The Psalmist has *already* said who the Gardener was. And He also knows who guards the garden—or *doesn't*.

It couldn't have been clearer. He'd hidden His face. So that those who pass by pluck fruit. That which was planted is ravaged. Later the Psalmist will write: **They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down** (v. 16).

So, it's no surprise the Psalmist calls out in verse 14: **Turn again, O God of hosts!** Now, this "turn" is something of a variant of the refrain. It's *almost* like the bridge of a song today. It's not a verse, but neither is it a chorus, but it sets up or gives meaning to the refrain. He'd called out for God to turn *them* back, repeatedly. Here, he calls out to God to turn toward them.

And he asks that He'd do so **again**. Clearly, He'd done it before. This is a prayer for restoration based on the past. In fact, what follows in verse 14 has been linked to that beautiful passage in Exodus 2 where Moses wrote that God heard, that God remembered, and that God saw (Ex. 2:24–25). See if you hear it in verse 14: **Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see.**

I trust you see how connected verse 14 is to the refrain. And in one sense how it prepares for it. Because for the Lord to *turn* toward His people would *also* be for His face to shine upon them.

¹¹ Ash, 395.

This is a prayer for restoration—in the present, based on the past, and answered in the future.

3. A Prayer for Restoration Answered in the Future (vv. 14–19)

The end of verse 14 continues the agricultural imagery: **Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine.** We know that in the Old Testament Israel is called a vine. But that's not *only* in the Psalms. It's *also* in Isaiah 5. And, of course, vines aren't *only* in the Old Testament. Verse 15 goes on to speak of this particular vine, the one taken out of Egypt: **have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted.**

Note, this vine is *also* the stock, meaning the *root* upon which the vine grows.¹² In terms of root, maybe think Isaiah again, but of course not *just* Isaiah.

The Psalmist asks the Lord of hosts to turn toward them so that He might see and have regard for this vine, this stock that He'd planted. And *then* He sings, at the end of verse 15: **and for the son whom you made strong for yourself.**

Now, it's easy to miss this in Exodus 4, or to try and explain it away, but *right* after the burning bush Yahweh tells Moses something that is not unclear: **Israel is my firstborn son** (Ex. 4:22). We can read right past that. But He didn't misspeak, nor was this relationship tangential to the narrative. In fact, Moses was to go and tell Pharaoh who Israel was, and that he was to let God's *son* go.

The Hebrews were the vine He'd planted. They were the son whom God had made strong. Verse 17 takes that imagery a step further. After praying that those who'd cut down the vine perish, he sings: **But let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!**

Does that sound familiar? Verse 15 spoke of a vine planted, a son whom God made strong for Himself. That pointed back to Israel. But verse 17 uses the *same* language, but instead saying something about a *Man* of God's right hand. Further, *this* time it's not *just* a son, but **the son of man whom you had made strong for yourself.**

This is what we mean by a prayer of restoration being *answered* in the future. Because there is a Son of Man that the Psalmist looks forward to, but not *just* him—Daniel as well. And that Son of Man was *also* the Man of God's right hand. Or as another Psalmist would say, **The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool"** (Ps. 110:1).

And speaking of God's right hand, this Son of Man was planted *by* Him—being promised from the stock, or root, of a man named Jesse. And when He came—this Son of Man, this Man at God's right hand—He made plain: **I am the true vine** (John 15:1).

And if that's not enough fulfilled imagery, He, the Chief Shepherd of God's people, was to be enthroned—He ascended—so that He might then restore. It's in Him that we behold the face of God. Because He, the light of the world, shines upon a people, so that they might be saved.

This was an ancient song, a prayer for restoration. And all the answers were yes and amen.

The Psalm ends with these words. They're something of a response to God's answer. Verse 18: **Then we shall not turn back from you; give us life, and we will call upon your name!**

"Calling upon His name" is not incidental here. Consider the slight, but not insignificant, development in the final refrain. Verse 19 is the same chorus, in essence, except *this* time it's not just "God," as in verse 3, nor is it "God of hosts" as in verse 7, the prayer is made to the One revealed at the burning bush. Note the all-caps in the final refrain: **Restore us, O LORD God of hosts! Let your face shine, that we may be saved!**

¹² Ash, 397.

And it was. To use Paul's words, **For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ** (2 Cor. 4:6).

Conclusion

This is an old song. And if "old" carries certain connotations, think instead of enduring. And then ask, "why?" Why has *this* endured? Why did God purpose that it would? Could it be made of something that is *itself* enduring? A song *not* limited to time, or era, but one that sings of something—or Someone—for more than one age, place, or circumstance.

What about a song that meets His people in *every* present based on an ancient past accompanied by strength for the future? And what if all *that* is in Christ? That is, He's the One that saved a people long ago, the One who does not abandon us in our present, and the One who will one day bring restoration.

So, that we might today *continue* to sing: **Restore us, O LORD God of hosts! Let your face shine, that we may be saved!**