

Psalm 77. Men and women in the Bible may have lived in a different time, but they were people nonetheless. Though their lives were simpler, they experienced problems like ours and often worse. They knew famine and drought, and the threat of war or invasion was very real for many of them.

When we come to psalm 77 we see a believer struggling to trust God in the throes of life. Comfort only came when he remembered and clung to the character of God. Even as the world crumbled around him, he found that the Lord is still good.

The Great Chicago Fire of 1871 incinerated 2,000 prime acres as drought and strong winds quickened the blaze to life. In the end, it consumed nearly 18,000 buildings and left 90,000 residents homeless. The city rebuilt rather quickly, but the devastation has been called one of the worst disasters of the twentieth century.

So many families were affected by the fire, one of them being the Spaffords. Horatio Spafford practiced law and had invested heavily in Chicago's real estate market. After most everything burned, he and his wife Anna decided to take some time away. She and their children went ahead to England while Horatio stayed behind to finish some business. En route, the ship sank, and Anna telegraphed a message home with these words: "Saved alone." Their four young daughters died as the ship went down.

Horatio immediately went to be with his wife. While traveling across the Atlantic, he wrote a hymn. The first verse you may recognize:

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.¹*

How could anything be well with this man's soul? He was a believer, and he chose to anchor his thoughts in the goodness of God. Horatio and Anna found hope in the midst of their hurt. How? Because they were convinced that their Father had not failed them, but was still faithful and loving.

I believe the psalmist could relate. In Psalm 77, we meet a man who pours out his soul, searches for answers from God and comes to a realization that changes everything. We see him struggle, but his gaze gradually turns from himself to the Lord. He finds comfort and peace in the end.

SEARING PAIN

(PSALM 77:1-6)

*Psalm 77:1-2—I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me.
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.*

The details are uncertain, but it is clear that Asaph is racked with pain. He cries "aloud to God" and repeats the phrase for intensity. He seeks the Lord and continually stretches out his hands to pray whether day or night. He prays and keeps on praying, but his "soul refuses to be comforted."

What pain these words convey in the English is dull next to their force in the Hebrew. This man's pain is crushing. His heart has never hurt so deeply. It is darkness without end, and yet, life goes on.

Psalm 77:3-6—When I remember God, I moan; when I meditate, my spirit faints. You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I consider the days of old, the years long ago. I said, "Let me remember my song in the night; let me meditate in my heart." Then my spirit made a diligent search.

The psalmist loves the Lord, and the Lord has afflicted Him with a trial. He tries to honor the Lord, but it's hard. He continues to pray, but the thought of God's presence pains his spirit. He thinks about life, what his has become but can't find the words to speak. God's kindness and goodness are now a distant memory as if nothing good is left, and life is hardly worth living. Like Job, life seems empty and bitter.

Can you relate? Has there ever been a time where God seemed distant to you, uncaring or unconcerned? The psalmist let his mind wander, and it became consumed with his circumstances, playing and replaying what had happened. It was a downward spiral that led him deeper into depression.

SEARCHING QUESTIONS

(PSALM 77:7-9)

Psalm 77:7-9—Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?

Comfort in Crisis

He then asks questions: Will God continue to reject? Will He ever show favor? Has His love ended? Are His promises void? Where is His grace? Is He angry?

Godly men and women have humbly asked these kinds of questions (Psa 13:1-2; Hab 1:2). They want to believe God is faithful, but sometimes it can be hard to see how. The Lord has promised to care for His people (Psa 103:13), and some trials it can be tempting to wonder if God cares at all.

Again, there's nothing wrong with Asaph's questions. Yet, it seems for a time he could not see anything past his own pain. In the first nine verses, he refers to himself 21 times—more than two times per verse. His vision had become myopic and his understanding dull. He lacked wisdom to see the bigger picture in his pain (Jas 1:5). Rather than having the joy that James speaks of, he only had more hurt (Jas 1:2).

God's people often struggle to have the wisdom to see rightly. Sometimes our faith burns to the ground, and we have no joy or sense of meaning in life. The solution is not for God to remove the trial, but for us to regain the right perspective. Asaph eventually did this, and that's when he found peace and comfort. He relearned to think rightly about God.

During a trial it is easy to question the goodness of God, wonder if He cares or is able to help. However, cling to those simple truths you know about Him and remain convinced. God is good to His people and doing what is good in their lives (Jas 1:17). We live by faith and not by sight, do we not (2 Cor 5:7)?

A SOOTHING REALIZATION (PSALM 77:10-14)

Psalm 77:10-14—Then I said, “I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God? You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples.”

In contrast to the first nine verses, Asaph refers to God 26 times in these remaining verses. Notice that he never received answers. The dots between his pain and God's purposes are never connected. Regardless, he makes a conscience choice to take God at His word. He chooses to remind himself of all the things he knows to be true

of his Father. The man struggled, but in the end chose to remain convinced that God had not failed him.

What did Asaph recall? God's attributes. Specifically, he reminds himself of God's greatness and says, “I will remember...” and “I will meditate...” upon it. He refocused his mind. His emotions clearly yearned for self-pity, but he chose to fight against them by thinking rightly. Truth governed his thinking as opposed to the winds of his feelings. The glasses or lenses through which he viewed the world had become dirty. He cleaned them.

**IT IS NOT AN EXPLANATION THAT WE NEED FOR OUR
HARDSHIPS BUT THE RIGHT LENS TO VIEW THEM
THROUGH.**

Asaph considers God's power and realizes that this same power exists even during his moment of need. The Lord was not powerless to help but had a reason for not doing so (John 11:1-6). Asaph never knew that reason, but the fact that God is sovereign and good was all he needed to know. A right view of God brought him comfort.

Does theology really matter at all? When kept strictly to the confines of academia, it means nothing. Yet, when it is rightly applied to life, one's theology is everything. Trials have a way of bringing out what we really believe about God. To the degree that our thoughts about Him are wrong, we will forfeit hope, joy, peace and comfort. We need good theology and the determination to cling to it when life hurts.

Turning from himself and trusting in all he knew to be true of the Lord, Asaph found something solid that soothed his soul. The simple truths he always knew about God's character were brought to bear upon his circumstances, and it made a world of difference.

*Hath God cast off forever? Can time His truth impair?
His tender mercy never shall I presume to share?
Hath He His lovingkindness shut up in endless wrath?
No; this is mine own blindness, that cannot see His path.²*

¹ *It is Well* by Horatio Spafford, 1873.

² *In Time of Tribulation* by James Montgomery, 1819.