

Introduction

As has been pointed out quite often in the past, the old yarn “The ends justify the means” is **NOT** a biblically supportable notion. With God, the means of arriving at the ends is just as important, if not more so. His desire is for us to be an effective and faithful Believer **during** the process, even when we can’t even yet begin to see the solution. When we’re in the midst of such trials or crises, how do we battle the inevitable doubt and questioning which arises to challenge the strength and quality of our faith? This particular Psalm provides some specific insights into dealing with and living through the middle of the process when the end is not only out of view, but we’re beginning to have personal doubts not just about ourselves, but God’s intentions.

Read verses 1-6

¹My voice rises to God, and I will cry aloud;
My voice rises to God, and He will hear me.
²In the day of my trouble I sought the LORD;
In the night my hand was stretched out without weariness;
My soul refused to be comforted.
³When I remember God, then I am disturbed;
When I sigh, then my spirit grows faint. Selah.
⁴You have held my eyelids open;
I am so troubled that I cannot speak.
⁵I have considered the days of old,
The years of long ago.
⁶I will remember my song in the night;
I will meditate with my heart,
And my spirit ponders:

Q: What does the repetition of “my voice rises to God” indicate?

A: In Hebrew literature, a dramatic emphasis of something is made by repeating it. It’s the author’s way of indicating he is not praying casually or simply meditating, but is coming before the Lord in very deep, emotional anguish.

Q: What does it mean in v.2 that he is seeking the Lord “in the day of my trouble”? Is he trying to say he’s coming to God late or only because he’s somehow at fault?

A: This is a common literary expression which describes a time of spiritual difficulty that is greater than usual. We don’t know for sure the source, but it could be because of personal sin, persecution for one’s faith, or a trial from God. Although there may be physical troubles involved, it describes something whose root cause is spiritual.

Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray.
James 5:13a

Q: Why would he refuse “to be comforted”? Isn’t that the answer to his prayer?

A: If it were comfort from God, that would be true. But since this is a spiritual issue, the overriding need is to know what the true spiritual conditions are that have brought this about. False comfort is something that turns our attention away from pursuing the truth of the issue, a kind of deadly denial. The desire is to reject the deception of false comfort.

Point: *Have you known someone or been in the situation where someone’s attempts to calm you down seem to irritate you even more because it does not address the issue of why these things are happening?*

Q: How do v.3-4 confirm for us that the root cause of the problem is spiritual in nature?

A: His thoughts of God in reference to this problem are both emotionally disturbing and physically fatiguing. It disrupts his ability to sleep, even to clearly articulate what is going on. (“I cannot speak”.)

Q: What suggests that this is not a “new” problem, that it’s something that may have been experienced previously by others?

A: In v.5 his thoughts turn to comparing his present condition with similar situations learned from others’ past, most likely the biblical teachings and accounts handed down. There’s something familiar with the situation which reminds of him of something similar to another’s.

Q: So what is one of the purposes and benefits of concentrated prayer concerning such dire situations?

A: It facilitates the process of examining in depth the cause and effect of the problem, a kind of spiritual house cleaning. Another way to phrase v.6 is “I swept my soul”, a description of purging out the bad to allow only the good to remain.

Point: We endure and go through things for a reason. Sometimes it’s the result of our own sin, bringing it on ourselves, other times it’s what others have done to us, sometimes it’s a trial or test from the Lord. Determining the cause is helpful to know how to pray, what to pray for, even the right direction to go. But there may be a time when those answers still elude us and our struggle is remaining spiritually open until God reveals them.

Application: “My voice rises to God...My voice rises to God...”

- At least with physical problems you know **the source of the problem**; this is not necessarily so with spiritual problems.
- There are times when the answer **eludes** us and the chief struggle is **enduring** until God **reveals** it.

Read verses 7-10

Observation: These might appear to be rhetorical questions whose common answer is that despite appearances, God is of course faithful to save. However, they may be describing an internal conflict where one answer is provided by someone giving in to unbelief (“Yes, God has abandoned me”), and another by someone maintaining their faith (“No, He is faithful”).

Q: What is the conclusion as to the origins of this struggle?

A: The bottom line is that it’s out of our control. It’s a poetical way of stating that it’s personally frustrating not to be able to do anything to change the situation (“It is my grief”), and that only God can properly address the issue.

⁷Will the LORD reject forever?
And will He never be favorable
again?
⁸Has His lovingkindness ceased
forever?
Has His promise come to an end
forever?
⁹Has God forgotten to be
gracious,
Or has He in anger withdrawn
His compassion? Selah.
¹⁰Then I said, “It is my grief,
That the right hand of the Most
High has changed.”

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Point: Our struggles with issues and problems often are tied to our struggle with whether or not we truly believe God is sovereign over them. It becomes a test of our faith and trust in Him.

Application: “Will the LORD reject forever...His lovingkindnesses ceased forever?”

- The essence of a test of faith is whether one truly believes in **the sovereignty** of God.

Read verses 11-15

¹¹I shall remember the deeds
of the LORD;
Surely I will remember Your
wonders of old.
¹²I will meditate on all Your
work
And muse on Your deeds.
¹³Your way, O God, is holy;
What god is great like our God?
¹⁴You are the God who works
wonders;
You have made known Your
strength among the peoples.
¹⁵You have by Your power
redeemed Your people,
The sons of Jacob and Joseph.
Selah.

Q: What mechanism is employed to strengthen faith in this situation?

A: Recalling God’s “deeds” (v.11), “wonders of old” (v.11), and “all Your work” (v.12). It’s finding reassurance that God’s workings in the past provide the best hope and indication of what He will do now and in the future.

Point: Note the verbs “meditate” and “muse” as they indicate not just casually recalling something but having studied and been immersed in them. It infers the benefits of studying His Word for times such as these.

Q: Why is it beneficial to be reminded of the character of God’s holiness?

A: Everything is made acceptable for God’s presence, whether purified from sin to be able to stand in His holy presence, or destroyed and prevented from coming before Him. This is crucial when considering how spiritual problems are being dealt with, understanding that the goal is to be purged of sin and made acceptable for continued living in His presence.

Q: When we begin to be reassured by past examples of God’s faithfulness and the purity of His ways, what are His attributes that inspire and strengthen us in v.14-15?

A: “You...work wonders”, “Your strength”, and “Your power”. We become more and more focused on the positive results of faith in God.

Q: Why doesn’t he refer to them as “Israel”, choosing instead to describe them as “sons of Jacob and Joseph”?

A: Bear in mind that Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph’s sons, were elevated and adopted by Jacob to being equal with his own sons for the purposes of defining the whole of the nation of Israel to come. This contains many layers of parallel meaning to the verses thus far, in that at one time Joseph’s situation was completely hopeless, cut off from Jacob and living in slavery in Egypt, only to find out that this was all part of God’s plan. What appeared to be “bad” actually resulted not only in his elevation of Joseph to ruling over Egypt, but being reconciled back to Jacob at an even greater rank.

Just as the psalmist faces the gravest of spiritual situations, wondering what God is doing, so Joseph went through the very same things with

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startling results because of his consistent trust in God regardless of the circumstances.

Application: *“I shall remember...I shall remember...”*

- *It’s not a casual effort required on our part, but something that requires **meditation** and **musings**.*
- *The example of Jacob and Joseph: Their most difficult times were God’s working.*

Read verses 16-20

¹⁶The waters saw You, O God;
The waters saw You, they were
in anguish;
The deeps also trembled.
¹⁷The clouds poured out water;
The skies gave forth a sound;
Your arrows flashed here and
there.
¹⁸The sound of Your thunder
was in the whirlwind;
The lightnings lit up the world;
The earth trembled and shook.
¹⁹Your way was in the sea
And Your paths in the mighty
waters,
And Your footprints may not be
known.
²⁰You led Your people like a
flock
By the hand of Moses and
Aaron.

Q: Why would the psalmist suddenly switch to describing Israel’s crossing of the Red Sea out of Egypt?

A: Just like Joseph’s situation, it was at one time a completely hopeless, impossible situation for a human to overcome. All of the elements involved are completely uncontrollable by man (“waters”, “deeps”, “clouds”, “thunder”, “whirlwind”, “lightnings”, “the earth”, “the sea”), which serve as metaphors for the way we feel in the midst of our deepest problems. We can’t control a single factor – only God can have an effect.

Q: What is the contrast of these conditions in how they appear to us versus how they respond to God?

A: We are filled with fear and dread at their very presence because they’re so much more powerful than us. But in God’s presence these overwhelming conditions are themselves “in anguish” and “trembled”, indicating that it’s not in vain that we trust Him who is so much more powerful than even the worst aspect of any situation.

Q: What were the things God provided through the Red Sea and that most impossible of situations?

A: “Your way” and “Your paths”. These combine to describe the fact that God was completely in control before they came to the Red Sea, while they crossed the Red Sea, and after they passed through the Red Sea. In spite of the terror of the circumstances leading up to and through it all, they were never out of God’s care or guidance.

Q: What is the meaning of the statement, “And Your footprints may not be known”?

A: It’s a way of expressing that it was obvious that the Red Sea crossing was effected by God, but no lasting physical evidence of it remained. It’s a picture of the complete work of faith in that we struggle with knowing what’s going on to begin with, we struggle with how He deals with it as it takes place, and so the **WHOLE** process is an exercise in faith. Even when it was finished, the waters returned to their normal state and it takes faith to look back on the event to understand and appreciate it properly.

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Q: How does this final reference to Moses and Aaron fit within the overall context of this teaching?

A: The keyword is actually “*flock*”, recognizing Moses and Aaron as an extension of the hand of God as the Shepherd. A shepherd isn’t controlled by his flock, but himself is in control over the direction and activities of the flock. It’s a very elegant way of stating that from the flock’s point of view, circumstances weren’t just beyond their control, but their understanding. They didn’t have the Shepherd’s perspective, whose flock had never left the safety of His protection nor been away from His control and direction.

Our point of view in the midst of dire circumstances is often contrary to Christ our Shepherd’s who has everything under control in spite of how it appears to us. This closing statement is quite a contrast to how this Psalm opens.

Application: *The waters saw You...The waters saw You...*”

- All the elements listed are completely **out of our control** and can overwhelm us.
- All the elements listed are completely **under God’s control** and can be overcome through Him.
- The Red Sea: It wasn’t an **obstacle**, it was something placed on God’s **path**
- The **flock** never has the **Shepherd’s** perspective; the **flock** has to trust and follow the **Shepherd** wherever He leads.

Overall Application

- Share an experience where things turned out far differently than where they seemed to be headed. What was God doing that you did not recognize **DURING** the process but only afterwards?
- Our faith is often challenged by the false notion that we know all the information and are aware of all the factors. How is this a test of our faith, to admit in the midst of a crisis that God knows more than we do?
- How well do we recognize that Bible stories are actually applicable to specific situations in our life? How does God’s Word provide examples of comfort and direction in times of crisis?

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