

Prayer in Distress / Psalm 102

MIT - The Psalmist shows that we can be honest and confident in calling out to God in distress.

Good evening if you have a Bible go ahead and turn to Psalm 102.

This psalm's author is anonymous and this is a psalm of individual lament and was most likely written after the Babylonian Exile that Israel experienced. There are some phrases we will see in this psalm that point out that time period in the history of Israel.

Throughout this psalm of lament, we will see three main points. The psalmist will show us in times of distress we can be:

1. Desperate for God v. 1-2
2. Honest with God v. 3-11
3. Confident in God v. 12-28

Let me read through the Psalm and then we will get started.

Psalm 102

Lets Pray.

Reading this psalm gives us a glimpse into the lament and devastation that was the Babylonian exile for the people of God.

This is a time in Israel's history where the people were not in their land, had no temple to worship at, and had not heard from God for decades. So that is the context and setting we should have in mind as we begin to look at these three points.

Our First point shows us that even during prayers of distress we can be...

#1 Desperate for God v. 1-2

Verse 1-2 is a focused understanding and effort to acknowledge God as the recipient of this prayer. The writer asks *God to hear his prayer, and to allow his cry to come before him.*

There is a sense that the writer here feels God is out there, possibly not near to him, and is desperate for God to hear his prayer. It is as if he has called out to God and not heard anything in response.

He pleads that God would not hide his face from him and again there is a sense of God being out there somewhere, but not near to him. He wants to be sure he has God's attention and seeks him desperately.

He does not want what he is about to say to fall on deaf ears, and he is hopeful, as we will see in the last point, that God can do something about what he is about to share with God.

In the ESV translation there are 3 exclamation points in these 2 verses which show the passion, persistence, and deep desire of the psalmist for God to hear his prayer.

Madi Illustration

This call to listen and pay attention reminds me of my Madi Grace. Madi does this when she desperately wants to be seen or heard by us. She calls us to look at her, to listen, to stop talking, to focus, or simply raises her voice over ours if we are talking.

She is desperate to get our attention because she has something to show us or tell us. She is adamant about getting our attention so we will pay attention to her.

In her mind we are the only audience that matters if she doesn't have our attention whatever she asks or does won't be acted upon. If she is hungry, thirsty, or just wants us to see her jump off the couch or do something silly, she is looking for acceptance and action from us.

Application

I think these 2 verses should lead us to examine our hearts and minds and see when the last time we were desperate for God?

Do we sincerely seek God's attention in our prayers to him or do we have more of a passive disposition toward our time talking with him?

Are we desperate for God to hear us, or do we come to him hoping he has time for us?

Do we believe he can do something about the things we pray for?

Many times how we pray reveals what we think or believe about God and there is a desperation in the psalmists tone that God is the only one who can do anything about the predicament he is in.

And in many ways, even in our lives, it takes difficult circumstances and suffering of some sort for us to be reminded we should be dependent on God daily.

However we come to our desperation for God we need to remember we should persist in prayer to God as we see in the example of the psalmist.

Next, after we are desperate for God we should be...

#2 Honest with God v. 3-11

There are some people in our lives that we are just brutally honest with.

This might be a spouse, a close friend, or other family member, but this person is who you go to to just get everything off your chest and you don't hold anything back.

Trey

That's what we see the psalmist do here in their prayer to God. He doesn't hold anything back, he bears all to God and lays it all out on the table.

Illustration

One commentator mentioned that this section of the psalm brings to mind **Tom Hank's character in Cast Away**, where he is abandoned on an island for several years where his body wastes away as he endures being alone on a remote island for quite some time.¹

He is utterly depleted.

Because of the context we know that the writer is experiencing the exile to Babylon or is in the midst of it and he gives us an honest view into his emotional, spiritual, and physical state.

We see several things he is experiencing, first...

Sadness v 3-4a, 9, 11

Verse 3 and the beginning of 4 speaks of him being so consumed with sadness and lament that it is as if nothing else happens during the day.

The days simply seem to be passing by as he sits in his sadness and lamentation.

Physically his sadness has made his bones even ache. It's a lament you feel deep with in you.

Verse 9 mentions that he *eats ashes and his tears mingle his drink.*

During times of personal lament or even corporate lament it was common to put ashes on ones head to symbolize the sadness that had overcome someone.

¹ Christ Centered Exposition. Tony Merida, Psalm 101-150.

And then in verse 11 he again mentions the correlation of the length of his circumstances to his sadness. He says, *my days are like a lengthening shadow*, so as the days go on and on, the weight of all he has experienced grow greater and greater.

Picking up in at the end of verse 4 we see that his sadness led to...

Weakness & brokenness v4b, 5, 11

In the second half of verse 4 the psalmist is *so sad that he forgets to eat food, his appetite has gone because of being consumed with grief*.

Verse 5 also speaks to this when with a word picture being given in the phrase *“my flesh sticks to my bones”* which simply denotes the loss of weight.

So there is a grief he is experiencing that is having severe physically effects on him.

It is an all-consuming grief.

Lastly, we see in verse 11 he *compares himself to grass that withers away*.

This is all profoundly vivid language that captures the dire situation the writer is experiencing.

And In this weakness and brokenness, he is also feeling...

Lonely v. 6, 7b

He compares himself to a “desert owl of the wilderness” owls in general are solitary creatures.

They are known to live by themselves and only sometimes live in pairs.²

Desert owls are usually seen completely alone and that is the picture he wants to paint for us to show how he is feeling.

This is also apparent in some ways through the first two verses.

In his plea for God to hear him and to not to turn his face from him, he is calling on God to make his presence known because he has felt totally alone.

The latter part of verse 7 also gives us a similar picture of a sparrow on the housetop.

² <https://kidadl.com/animal-facts/desert-owl-facts>

Maybe you have seen a powerline or a rooftop that just has that one bird up there all alone.

That's the feeling he is seeking to express.

Along with the loneliness he is feeling, verse 8 points out a sense of oppression he is experiencing.

Oppression v. 8

He points out his enemies taunt him.

And the reference to enemies could be the Babylonians if this was written at the beginning of their exile or during it, or it could be those in surrounding areas of Jerusalem as the Jewish people began to return to rebuild the temple and city walls.

There are several people named in the book of Nehemiah such as Tobiah, Sanballet, and Geshen who created problems for Nehemiah as he returned to lead the Jewish people to rebuild the city.

And lastly in his honest lament to God, he expresses the feeling of punishment in verse 10...

Punishment v. 10

The psalmist expresses the sense of being punished by God, he says, *"because of your indignation and anger; for you have taken me up and thrown me down."*

He says this in thinking he is actually receiving punishment from God.

And in sense that could be the case. We know that God allows Israel to be taken into Babylonian exile as discipline for their idolatry and sinfulness.

But there is also a truth here that could be helpful.

Sometimes in our suffering, especially when it comes to things we have not brought upon ourselves, there is a temptation to possibly see it as punishment from God.

This is an honest perspective of the psalmist and I think gets at what we might feel sometimes when go through things we can't really explain why they are happening to us.

So I want to give us two categories to think through when we have this feeling.

First, our suffering is a time of testing to lead us to a closer intimacy with God. A time of testing to make us dependent on God and to grow in our need and affections for him.

Secondly, we could be experiencing suffering because of the consequences of our sin, known and unknown sin, or the sins of others, which results in all types of suffering and brokenness.

But one thing we need to remember is that God will not punish us for things his Son has already paid for. Jesus has paid the wrath and punishment for our sins of the past, present, and future.

This does not mean that we will not suffer the immediate consequences of our sin, but this is not punishment from God.

God offers us forgiveness and his mercies are new every morning.

Application

The main application for us I think in these sections is that when we experience suffering like this.

When we are overcome with sadness, weakness, brokenness, loneliness, oppression, or even the feeling of punishment we should run to God in prayer.

There is such a temptation to run from him or blame him for what is happening to us, but the example of psalmist here is so good for us to see.

Run to God during these times. Run to God in this time of distress.

Illustration

Dunkirk Movie / Event

And the last point, verses 12-28 show us why we should run to God because we see that we can be...

#3 Confident in God v. 12-28³

Verse 12 is an obvious shift in the psalmists focus and perspective. He moves from focusing on himself and the honest lament he brings before God to remind himself and us of who God is.

First we see that...

He is King v. 12

³ Outline of this section comes from CCE Commentary from Merida.

Verse 12 reminds us that God is king, he is *enthroned forever* the verses says and he will be *remembered throughout generations*.

And the fact that we are all here tonight singing songs to God and studying his word is a testament to this truth.

For generations and generations up until now God's rule has been honored and will continue to be honored until he returns.

Next we can have confidence in God for...

He has Compassion v. 13-14

God's compassion is called up as the psalmist knows that God will not leave Zion, or Jerusalem, in ruin.

He will *"arise and have pity on Zion"* as the text says.

It is time for God to act on behalf of his people and to restore them. The passage almost reminds God that it is time to do something, it is time to restore Zion.

And this reminder is not unfounded.

We know that God promises the people of Israel to have compassion on them. We find that promise in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 29:10–14 tells us,

¹⁰For this is what the LORD says: "When seventy years for Babylon are complete, I will attend to you and will confirm my promise concerning you to restore you to this place.

¹¹For I know the plans I have for you"—this is the LORD's declaration—"plans for your well-being, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

¹²You will call to me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

¹³You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart.

¹⁴I will be found by you"—this is the LORD's declaration—"and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and places where I banished you"—this is the LORD's declaration. "I will restore you to the place from which I deported you."

The psalmist knows that God is compassionate and faithful and will fulfill his promise to his people and he calls on God to do so.

He basically communicates that the people of God are sitting on G waiting on O when it comes to being restored. In verse 14 He says, "your servants hold her stones dear and have pity on her dust."

This statement is referring to the stones and dust of the ruined temple and city, and the psalmist knows God is compassionate and will restore them both and calls God to do so.

The next characteristic of God we see the psalmist highlight is that...

He is Sovereign 15-16

Even with the lament and brokenness he is experiencing in the devastation of his home and land, he still clings to the truth that God is sovereign.

Verse 15 he says, *The nations will fear the name of the Lord and all the kings of the earth will fear your glory.*

What is so amazing about this verse is the situation that the psalmist is in right now says that this is not true, yet he knows that God has promised to restore them and clings to that promise.

He knows the truth of Jeremiah 29 and speaks to it in a way in verse 16 when he says, *“For the Lord builds up Zion; he appears in his glory.”*

Although he is in exile having been taken over by another empire, he knows that God will make good on his promise because he is Sovereign even when it doesn't look like it.

In a similar way God will bring that same restoration in our whole world one day when he returns and all the events of this past week and delusion that mankind is in charge and one country can take over another country will be put to rest.

Because of God's sovereignty, we all know that a day is coming when all bow and confess that Jesus is Lord.

Oh, how we look forward to that day.

Next I want to take a quick look at verse 17 that shows us something important about God...

He Hears His People v. 17

We read, *“he regards the prayer of the destitute and does not despise the their prayer.”*

God is one who hears those who cry out to him in desperation, weakness, and brokenness.

Psalm 34:18 tells us that, *“The LORD is near the brokenhearted; he saves those crushed in spirit.”*

And this verse should remind us of another times when God's people called out to him and he answered.

Exodus 2 tells us, *"The Israelite's groaned because of their difficult labor, they cried out and their cry for help because of the difficult labor ascended to God. God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."*

This is such an amazing reminder that God will hear his people. He remembered them time and time again, and even today he will remember us in our affliction.

This theme continues in, verses 18 – 22 point out...

He is Faithful v.18-22

God's faithfulness is seen really covering over all of verses 12-28, but here we see an insight into God's faithfulness not only to the psalmist, but also to those who would come after him.

The psalmist is so confident in the truth that God is going to do something about his suffering, he calls for the events to come to be recorded for generations to come to know that God is faithful and worthy of praise.

It is like being in the midst of suffering and already looking forward to the day you can talk about how great God was and what all God did through your time of suffering.

The psalmist is so focused on God even in this terrible situation he is already visualizing the God glorifying outcome that will come because of God's faithfulness.

Again, in verses 19-20 God's faithfulness is tied to his act of deliverance that the psalmist knows is coming where he will, *"free those who were doomed to die."* In verse 20.

Then in verses 21-22 we see another glimpse into a universal truth of God, and that is he is always about his glory and worship.

The faithful acts of God to restore the Israelites brings God worship.

He brings salvation so that, *"they may declare in Zion the name of the Lord and in Jerusalem his praise.....to worship the Lord."*

It is amazing that God has correlated His glory and our good together.

That in our salvation and restoration, God is glorified leading to our good and his glory.

It is such a beautiful way he structured his relationship with us and because of his faithfulness we can rest assured that bringing **God glory will always be for our good.**

Now lastly we see in verses 23-28 the psalmist shows us that we can be confident in God because...

He Never Changes v. 23-28

He begins this section with a plea to God.

The psalmist believes this distress and suffering will bring an end to his short life and pleads with God to “take me not away” so that he might see these faithful acts of God.

Then he compares his short life with that of God who endures throughout all generations.

From the foundation of the world God does not and has not changed.

Verse 26 speaks to *the truth that the foundations of the earth and the heavens might perish, but God will still remain.*

He says of the earth and the heavens, *“you will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same and your years have no end.*

This truth should always be a comfort to us.

The same God we see be so faithful throughout all the scriptures we know will be faithful to us for he is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

We can be confident in God because he fulfills the request of the psalmist because Ezra and Nehemiah return and establish the temple and city of Jerusalem again, bringing the out of exile.

In the same way that Jesus has come to bring us out of the exile of our sin to restore us in right relationship with him.

And when Jesus came to dwell among us and give his life to pay the price we could not pay I imagine he felt many of the things we saw in the second point.

Weak, broken, alone and lonely, and oppressed and Jesus endured all those things to bring about our salvation.

So we can come to him during those times of suffering and brokenness knowing he himself experienced those things but also knowing he is a God that:

Is King over all and in control, he is compassionate, he is sovereign, he hears his people and is near to the broken hearted, he is faithful, and he never changes.

So tonight we can be thankful that during times of being desperate for God, we can be honest with him in our prayers to him and confident in his character and confident that he hears us and is near to us.

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