

Where to look when all is gray and scary

When Asaph looks at his present circumstances, he's upset. When he thinks about the future, he's scared. Where do you look when the present is awful and the future is terrifying? Where does Asaph look?

Psalm 77:10-14

¹⁰ Then I said, "I will appeal to this,
to the years of the right hand of the Most High."

¹¹ I will remember the deeds of the LORD;
yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.

¹² I will consider all your works
and meditate on all your mighty deeds."

¹³ Your ways, God, are holy.
What god is as great as our God?

¹⁴ You are the God who performs miracles;
you display your power among the peoples.

Asaph turns from his troubles to ponder God's right hand—the hand of action. He considers the hand that created the universe and parted the Red Sea. He forces himself to remember what God has done.

Notice that in verses 1-9 it was always I, me and my. Where do his eyes look after verse 10?

Some points to make:

What does Asaph do in these verses besides remembering?

Do you think he just spun around on a dime, from despair to praise? Or was it maybe a process?

What can you praise and thank God for that he has done?

You can go on to read the rest of the Psalm if you like. It is Asaph's detailed description of what the parting of the Red Sea must have been like. He's meditating, forcing himself to ponder God's goodness and power.

Encouraging the Downcast Using Psalm 77

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation
— *Psalm 42:5*

Do God's true children struggle with doubt and fear?

Psalm 77 was written by Asaph, a man who lived at the same time as King David (Nehemiah 12:46). He was a performer and a worship leader, he sang and played instruments as a part of his ministry in the tabernacle (1Ch 15:19)

He was also the composer and publisher of psalms. He wrote 12 psalms himself, and he collected and distributed King David's music (1 Chronicles 16:7) Asaph's name means "gatherer."

And Asaph was a teacher. His students continued his ministry after his death. 500 years later, at the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem, we read in Ezra 3 that it was "the sons of Asaph" who praised the Lord with music and song. The example he set lived on long after he died.

So, we have this important man, who works very close to the Lord, doing "kingdom work" every day of his life. His job is to sing, write and play worship music. You might think he'd be happy and well-adjusted, right? No doubts or struggles in his walk? No.

Psalm 77:1-4

- ¹ I cried out to God for help;
I cried out to God to hear me.
- ² When I was in distress, I sought the Lord;
at night I stretched out untiring hands,
and I would not be comforted.
- ³ I remembered you, God, and I groaned;
I meditated, and my spirit grew faint.
- ⁴ You kept my eyes from closing;
I was too troubled to speak.

Some points to make:

Does this sound familiar? Now, or at another time?

God doesn't mind when you cry out to him. It doesn't mean you lack faith, or have done something wrong.

Asaph's good theology fails him

We don't know what problem was keeping Asaph awake at night. But it's something bad enough to make him wrestle with doubt.

Psalm 77:5-9

- ⁵ I thought about the former days,
the years of long ago;
- ⁶ I remembered my songs in the night.
My heart meditated and my spirit asked:
- ⁷ "Will the Lord reject forever?
Will he never show his favor again?"
- ⁸ Has his unfailing love vanished forever?
Has his promise failed for all time?
- ⁹ Has God forgotten to be merciful?
Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"

In verses 7-8, Asaph begins to question God. This temple priest questions whether God can or will help him. "Is this situation ever going to get better? Has God's unfailing love vanished forever?" Look at that in v8. Has his unfailing love failed? He acknowledges God's great character, and doubts it—all in the same breath.

And then in verse 9 he starts to blame himself, and doubt God's compassion for him. Maybe God's mercy has run out. Or he is too busy and doesn't notice that I'm suffering down here.

Or maybe God is there, but he won't help me. "Has he in anger withheld his compassion." Maybe I messed up one time too many. Maybe he's dropped me from his list. Maybe it's all my fault.

Some points to make:

Asaph is in a place many of us can identify with. Can you?

What encouragement do we get that these words are in the Bible, that God's Word contains bad theology, doubt and questions?