

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 18: Psalm 102

A Season of Prayer

Stay on the Path ~

The superscription to Psalm 102 entitles it as “a prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed and pours out his complaint before the Lord.” There is no other psalm in Scripture with this heading. In it the psalmist depicts a season of tremendous adversity when he is distraught and without answers. He realizes the only thing he can do about his condition and his circumstances is to pray—pray—pray.

When life gets tough time can drag on endlessly . . . minutes become hours turning into days, then months, and even years, from which there seems to be no end to the suffering. Physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, desolation and brokenness take over until the only relief comes as the sufferer turns to talk to God about his despair.

This psalm is an encouragement to every believer that God knows our frame and He allows us to be human. He wants us to tell Him how we feel, what we’re thinking, what we hope for, and most of all that we want His supreme will above our own. As we talk to Him, He talks to us. The Holy Spirit takes our clumsy words and intercedes on our behalf, bearing witness to us through His language of comfort and faith. Ultimately, He brings us through to the place of experientially realizing that He has been working all things out for our future good. The prayer that was begun in despair ends on a high note of praise!

Did you know ~

Psalm 102 is designated as one of the seven penitential psalms (Ps 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143). It is classified in this category because it focuses on the personal suffering brought about by the consequence of sin. The structure consists of both a lament and a prophetic hymn. God’s people believed they had been rejected by Him because of their disobedience. The psalmist’s purpose was to reignite a fire in the hearts of the people to begin to once again hope in the Lord’s promises.

Psalm 102

The Lord's Eternal Love
A Prayer of the afflicted, when he
is overwhelmed and pours out his
complaint before the Lord.

- 1 Hear my prayer, O Lord,
And let my cry come to You..
- 2 Do not hide Your face from me
in the day of my trouble;
Incline Your ear to me;
In the day that I call,
answer me speedily.
- 3 For my days are consumed
like smoke,
And my bones are burned like a hearth.
- 4 My heart is stricken and withered
like grass,
So that I forget to eat my bread.
- 5 Because of the sound of my groaning
My bones cling to my skin.
- 6 I am like a pelican of the wilderness;
I am like an owl of the desert.
- 7 I lie awake,
And am like a sparrow alone
on the housetop.
- 8 My enemies reproach me all day long;
Those who deride me swear an oath
against me.
- 9 For I have eaten ashes like bread,
And mingled my drink with weeping.
- 10 Because of Your indignation and
Your wrath;
For You have lifted me up and
cast me away.
- 11 My days are like a shadow
that lengthens,
And I wither away like grass .
- 12 But You, O Lord, shall endure forever,
And the remembrance of Your name
to all generations.
- 13 You will arise and have mercy on Zion;
For the time to favor her,
Yes, the time, has come.
- 14 For Your servants take pleasure in
her stones,
and show favor to her dust.

15 So the nations shall fear the name
of the Lord,
And all the kings of the earth
Your glory.

16 For the Lord shall build up Zion;
He shall appear in His glory.

17 He shall regard the prayer of the
destitute,
And shall not despise their prayer.

18 This will be written for the generation
to come,
that a people yet to be created
may praise the Lord.

19 For He looked down from the height
of His sanctuary;
From heaven the Lord viewed
the earth,

20 To hear the groaning of the prisoner,
To release those appointed to death,
21 To declare the name of the Lord
in Zion,
And His praise in Jerusalem,

22 When the peoples are gathered
together,
And the kingdoms, to serve the Lord.

23 He weakened my strength in the way;
He shortened my days.
24 I said, "Oh my God,
Do not take me away in the midst of
my days;
Your years are throughout all
generations.

25 Of old You laid the foundation
of the earth,
And the heavens are the work of
Your hands.

26 They will perish, but You will endure;
Yes, they will all grow old like
a garment;
Like a cloak You will change them,
And they will be changed.

27 But You are the same,
And Your years will have no end.

28 The children of Your servants will
continue, and their
descendants will be
established before You."

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 102.

Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions

What is the *tone* of Psalm 102? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

Put a psalm in your heart ~ (Memory verse) Psalm 102:1–2

(Write out the verse in the spaces below. Practice it each time you open your lesson.)

Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come to You. Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my trouble; incline Your ear to me; in the day that I call, answer me speedily.

Learn the lessons of the psalm ~

Selah (Think about):

Psalm 102 was written during one of the lowest points in the history of God's people. The setting for this psalm took place during the Babylonian captivity when the people were taken away as prisoners to a foreign land, making it appear that God had turned away from them. His house lay in ruins, the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, and the people were in despair. But God would not leave them there . . .

I. There is despair apart from God's divine intervention. vv. 1–11

The psalmist launches into an emotional plea for help, turning to God to intervene and bring an end to the suffering and captivity: *Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come to You* (v.1). They are the words of someone who hears only silence from heaven—God is not listening.

1. In verse 2, the psalmist gets specific, pressing his plea. What does he urge God to do? Notice the increasing intensity of his words.

2. The metaphors in this psalm are numerous, revealing the frailty and transitory nature of life. To what does the psalmist liken his life in the following:
 - a. v. 3a: *My days*—
 - b. v. 3b: *My bones*—
 - c. v. 4: *My heart*—
 - d. v. 5: *My groaning*—

In verses 6–8, the psalmist's life is compared to that of a bird. Unable to rest, he desires the warmth of fellowship and home but instead experiences uncomfortable loneliness and the deafening sound of silence.

3. How does he describe his condition in the following? (Picture in your mind the habitat of the bird's existence.)
 - a. v. 6:

 - b. v. 7:

 - c. v. 8:

 - d. Personal: A *pelican*, an *owl*, a *sparrow*; each isolated and alone. When did you experience similar circumstances to that of the psalmist? Briefly explain.

4. From verses 8–11, summarize the psalmist's end apart from God's divine intervention.

Alone, his enemies taunting him, the psalmist acknowledges his suffering, unable to even think about eating or sleeping. Fearing he might die before seeing God intervene, he desperately calls upon the Lord to make Himself known.

How encouraging, even exhilarating, that this psalm does not end at verse 11. Although pain is very real, the power of God is even more real! In spite of his predicament and uncertainty, the psalmist gains sight of the fact that God is still on the throne reigning over all. He reverently reminds God that it is time to show His favor upon His people.

II. There is hope in God's unalterable plan. vv. 12–22

The temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Babylonians, the city walls torn down, God's work had halted, but the time would soon come when God would restore, revealing His glory.

1. Because the Lord endures forever, what does the psalmist say will take place in the future, fulfilling His purpose?
 - a. vv. 12–13:
 - b. vv. 14–15:
 - c. vv. 16–17:

Believing in hope, the psalmist declares that a future generation would live to see God's holy city restored and His people returned. God would look down from heaven to hear their groans, releasing them from captivity. In return, the people would serve Him, praising His name (vv. 19–22).

Pause & ponder ~

If your circumstances seem to have made a prisoner out of you, turn this time of pain into a season of prayer. Press in . . . draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Take some time to meditate on Luke 11:9–13. *Ask—seek—knock—consider* the progression in prayer. When you *ask*, you recognize your inability to meet your need; when you *seek*, you realize you must look to God alone for the answer; when you *knock*, you become persistent in your request until God opens the door and supplies the answer! Share a time recently when you prayed and God answered.

III. There is triumph in God's immutable power. vv. 23–28

Following his declaration of his strong hope in God, the psalmist falls back into despair, returning again to his original complaint.

1. The Lord had weakened him to the point of death, prompting what plea? v. 24

2. In his weakness the psalmist took comfort and strength in God's immutability. Of what was his heart assured?
 - a. v. 25:

 - b. v. 26:

 - c. v. 27:

Pause & ponder ~

In a world where God's Word is attacked and God's glory is obscured, there is the shining promise that what is written is for the generations yet to come. The work of His hands through His people will be established in the future, for with God all things are possible!

The closing verses 25–27 are applied to the Lord Jesus Christ in Hebrews 1:10–12 in affirmation of His deity. Compare the passages, and write out the promise of Psalm 102:28.

Live the psalm ~

Remember that Psalm 102 gives you permission to be human—to talk to God on that level. He expects you to be blatantly honest, down to your doubts and lack of faith in times of trouble. What is the take-away truth you'd like to apply from the psalm?

Pray the psalm ~

Tell the Lord in prayer what you wrote down in the *Live the Psalm* section above. Dare to be transparent—hold nothing back. Continue to *ask*, *seek*, and *knock* until the answer comes.

Hope defined: ***Holding on [with] patient expectation!***
Catherine Martin

