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

Prayer for Mercy in Affliction

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 set 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, “O 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,
28 The children of Your servants will continue,
   And their descendants will be established before You.”

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“Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law.” – Psalm 119:18

The basic thing to remember about observing a psalm is that it is poetry—and poets think in images. Whatever type of psalm it may be (praise or lament, meditation or petition, just to name a few) the psalmist uses familiar images to turn his experience into a picture. He uses figurative language to reflect on God’s character and express the stirrings of his own soul.

Start by reading the entire psalm through a few times. You might try reading it aloud, or have someone else read it while you listen intently.

Some things to look for: Does the psalmist compare or contrast one thing to another? Does he repeat a specific word or phrase to emphasize a theme? The psalmist may use hyperbole (an exaggeration for the sake of effect, not meant to be taken literally). What experience does he describe? What emotions does he express? What characteristics of God does he mention? Does he make a vow or a declaration? Use the first column to describe what the psalmist says. Use the second column to jot down your own notes, thoughts, impressions or questions.

Write the definition of words listed in each section. Use a regular dictionary or an Old Testament Word Study dictionary if you have one.

Psalm 102:1-11
What the psalmist says: My notes and personal observations:

trouble (v. 2) ____________________________
reproach (v. 8) ____________________________

Did you know . . .

Using vivid images to describe his personal suffering, the psalmist compared himself (among other things) to an owl and a pelican, both detestable birds that were avoided as unclean (Leviticus 11:17-18). Owls are solitary creatures that don’t build nests of their own; they take shelter in abandoned nests, holes and buildings. Owls were viewed in ancient culture as symbols of misfortune, ill health and death. Pelicans are water birds that flock together along the coast. A pelican living in a dry and desolate wilderness, away from its natural habitat, pictures the isolation our suffering psalmist must have experienced.
### Psalm 102:12-22

**What the psalmist says:**  
In spite of his own suffering, what does the Psalmist declare about the Lord?

**My notes and personal observations:**  


### Psalm 102:23-28

**What the psalmist says:**  
In closing his prayer, who is the psalmist thinking of, and what does he declare about them?

**My notes and personal observations:**  


CONSIDER

According to Psalm 102 . . .

In spite of troubling times and circumstances, what can a believer be confident of? __________
________________________________________________________

What will help us, as believers, to rise above the circumstances? __________________________
________________________________________________________
INTERPRET and APPLY

“The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.”
– Psalm 119:130

Look for a spiritual lesson. The imaginative language of the Psalms helps us to understand that God’s Word provides guidance for our feelings as well as our faith. As you look for spiritual lessons, keep in mind that this collection of prayers and songs teaches us how to worship God—not just with our lips but with our lives. While the Psalms address all aspects of life and human experience, ultimately they point us back to our Creator.

Ask:  What is the theme of this psalm? How does the psalmist express himself to God?  What does this psalm reveal about God’s character or His relationship with His people? Is there a command to obey? Is there a promise to claim? Is there a condition to that promise? Is there a warning to heed? Is there an example to follow or avoid?  **State the lesson in one simple sentence.**

“I pondered the direction of my life and I turned to follow Your statutes.
I will hurry, without lingering, to obey Your commands.”
– Psalm 119:59-60 NLT

We don’t read the Bible just to gather information—we want to spiritually grow. Our heart needs to be open to change. The only way to move truth off the pages of your Bible and into your life is to **put it into action.**

To apply a spiritual lesson, we must examine ourselves and take deliberate steps to obey what we have learned. Ask yourself: What can I learn from the psalmist’s experience?  How does this help to line up my feelings with my faith? Does it provide comfort? Does it provide correction? Think of how the lesson relates to you and what specific course of action you will take. **Write your application in the form of a question to make it personal.**

**Psalm 102:1-11**
Lesson:  
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
Application:  
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
                               ?

**Psalm 102:12-22**
Lesson:  
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
Application:  
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
                               ?

**Psalm 102:23-28**
Lesson:  
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
Application:  
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
                               ?
Summary
Write a simple sentence that summarizes what the psalm is about.

Give your own title to the psalm to help you remember what it says.

Up close and personal

But You are the same and Your years will have no end. 
The children of Your servants will continue, 
and their descendants will be established before You.
Psalm 102:27-28

Memorize God’s Word

Choose the translation you prefer to memorize the verse in and re-write it here.

Meditate on God’s Word

As you memorize this verse, let it work into your heart and mind. Scripture meditation is like a good cup of tea: the longer it steeps, the richer the flavor. So give yourself permission to slowly savor God’s Word! Use the questions below (like a tea bag) to keep dipping into this verse.

Challenge alert: You won’t always see an obvious answer directly from the verse. Just think and pray about it and share what the Lord brings to your heart and mind.

Look up. What does this verse teach you about God? (For example, look for signs of His character, His attributes, His works, His promises.)

Look around. What does this verse teach you about the world and people in general?
Look within. What does this verse teach you about yourself?

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Look ahead. Does this verse give you reason to hope? Briefly share your thoughts.

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Look alive! Given the opportunity, how would you express the truth found in this verse to someone who needs to hear it?

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Make God’s Word Your Prayer
As you memorize and meditate on this verse, pray it back to the Lord. Let the Holy Spirit examine your heart, increase your understanding, and help you to pray. Ask Him for faith and strength to act on the truth of God’s Word.

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

A Lamp to my Feet and a Light to my Path
What has been the most important lesson, for you personally, as you studied this psalm? How will you begin today to put what you are learning into practice?

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________