

# The Unseen Footprints of God

## *Psalm 77*

January 14, 2026 — Wednesday Evening Devotion  
Pastor Trent Eastman | New Baptist Church, Huntington, WV

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### **Introduction: Footprints in the Sand**

There is a much-loved poem called “Footprints in the Sand,” attributed to Mary Stevenson. You have probably encountered it before — on a greeting card, a wall hanging, perhaps at a difficult moment in your own life. But in case you haven’t, let me read it to you.

*One night I had a dream — I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord, and across the sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints, one belonged to me and the other to the Lord. When the last scene of my life flashed before me, I looked back at the footprints in the sand. I noticed that many times along the path of my life, there was only one set of footprints. I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in my life. This really bothered me and I questioned the Lord about it. “Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you would walk with me all the way, but I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life there is only one set of footprints. I don’t understand why in times when I needed you most, you should leave me.” The Lord replied, “My precious, precious child, I love you and I would never, never leave you during your times of trial and suffering. When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.”*

In many ways, this is the message of our psalm tonight. But Psalm 77 does not begin with a dream of walking peacefully along the beach with the Lord. It begins with just the opposite — lying awake in bed, wondering if God has forgotten you altogether.

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### **A Prayer Born from Pain**

When do you pray? I am not talking about the time of day. I mean what motivates you to pray — what drives you to it. I find that my own prayers tend to fall into roughly four categories.

There are the routine prayers: set times of personal study and devotion, the prayer of thanks at dinner, the quiet intercessions I bring before the Lord for those on my heart — sometimes for

many of you. Then there are the prayers of praise, the unplanned and unexpected ones that arise when I am genuinely happy or content. Something fills up in the chest and you just have to say, *Thank you, Jesus*. Third, there is the corporate prayer — the prayer I offer publicly as a pastor, on behalf of a congregation.

And then there is the fourth kind. Let us call it the panic prayer, or the prayer of need. This is the prayer that rises when I am stricken with worry or anxiety, when my heart is heavy, when what I need is not a polished expression of thanks but a cry for help. It is a prayer that comes out of depth — real depth — of pain.

The book of Psalms holds all of these types of prayer. Read the opening three verses of Psalm 77, and tell me which category this one falls into:

*I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me. In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted. When I remember God, I moan; when I meditate, my spirit faints. Selah*

This is unmistakably a prayer of need. Look at the verbs: *I cry aloud. I stretched out my hand without wearying. My soul refuses to be comforted. I moan. My spirit faints*. And then verse 4: *“I am so troubled that I cannot speak.”* This prayer is not coming from a place of tranquility. It is coming from a place of pain.

What caused the psalmist’s pain? The text does not tell us directly. Perhaps it was some national catastrophe — the kind of devastation that came when the Babylonian army marched into Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and carried thousands of Jews into captivity. Perhaps the psalm reflects the experience of the Exile itself, written in the shadow of the contempt described in Psalm 137:

*By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?*

Or perhaps it was something more personal — a sickness, a danger, a situation that had pressed the psalmist down to where the other psalms find their writers crying, *“Out of the depths have I cried unto you”* (Psalms 30 and 130).

Whatever the cause, the experience is recognizable. A loved one is sick. A marriage is unraveling. A frightening diagnosis has arrived. A job is gone and the finances are collapsing. These are the various depths from which people cry out to God — have always cried out to God. And if you have ever truly been in that kind of need, you know exactly what verse 2 is describing: *“In the night my hand is stretched out without wearying.”* Sleep will not come. The

image the psalmist uses — stretching out the hand — is the image of someone drowning. The waters have closed over his head, and he is reaching up, desperately, for something to grab hold of. It is out of that place that this prayer is born.

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## Remembering God's Faithfulness

The next stanza, verses 4 through 9, shows us what the psalmist does in those sleepless hours. He thinks back.

*You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I consider the days of old, the years long ago. I said, "Let me remember my song in the night; let me meditate in my heart." Then my spirit made a diligent search.*

Before going further, notice something in these first six verses. The psalmist uses words like *me* and *my* approximately twenty times. He refers to God — *God, Lord, You, He* — only about six times. What does that tell us? He is looking down, not up. He is, in some very honest and human way, consumed with himself. There is real struggle here, real doubt, real depression. And to his credit, he is being completely honest with God about it. But the ratio is revealing.

Here are the questions he asks:

*"Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?" Selah*

Notice what is being called into question. The psalmist is not raising abstract philosophical doubts. He is questioning the very covenant character of God — every attribute by which Israel's God had made himself known. Is God still compassionate? Is he still gracious? Is his love still steadfast? Has he truly maintained his promises? One by one, the great characteristics of the covenant God of Israel are placed under the pressure of personal suffering.

Have you ever asked questions like these? *God, are you angry with me? Do you love me? Do you still care? Have you forgotten me?* When a person is pressed down to those depths — of despair, of discouragement, of fear — these are the questions that surface. And they are not signs of weak faith. They are signs of faith being honest under enormous strain.

If this is where you are tonight — if you are sitting in the dark and wondering whether God still loves you or even thinks about you — I want you to hear this: despite what you are feeling, God does not withdraw his love or his care. He is present in your pain and in whatever

darkness you are moving through today. Which is, in fact, exactly what the rest of this psalm is about.

Let me answer those questions the psalmist raises, because the psalm itself will answer them:

Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? *No*. Has his steadfast love forever ceased? *No*. Are his promises at an end for all time? *No*. Has God forgotten to be gracious? *No*. Has he in anger shut up his compassion? *No*.

Even when we feel that God is absent, he is not. He sees you and he holds your hand. And this is what the remainder of the psalm declares.

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## Held in the Hand of God

We come now to verse 10, which is the pivotal verse of the entire psalm. It hinges on a Hebrew word, *challoti*, that can be translated in two different directions — as *infirmity* or *wound* on one hand, or as *appeal* or *entreaty* on the other. The King James Version reads it the first way:

And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.

The ESV reads it the second way:

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

Both of these readings are profound, and I actually think the ambiguity is intentional — a deliberate word play. Read the KJV and the meaning is: *here is my sickness — I have forgotten the years that God's right hand has held me*. Read the ESV and the meaning is: *I place myself, I appeal, into the right hand of the Most High*. Both are implied, and both are true. My soul is sick precisely because I have forgotten those years that God's right hand has carried me. And now, again, I place what worries me back into that same hand.

And so, in verses 11 and 12, the psalmist turns a corner:

I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.

So instead of looking down — *woe is me* — he now looks up: *mighty are you*. And everything that follows reflects this shift.

*Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God? You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples. You with your arm redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph. Selah*

Do you see what has just happened? In verses 7 through 9, the psalmist was questioning every attribute of God. *Has his love ceased? Have his promises failed? Has he forgotten to be gracious?* But now, in verses 13 through 15, he is not questioning anymore — he is declaring. *Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God? You are the God who works wonders.* The same attributes he was interrogating have now become the substance of his praise.

This is the cure for spiritual amnesia. When we are drowning in our circumstances, when our troubles are so loud we cannot hear anything else, we forget who God is. We forget what he has done. And that forgetfulness becomes its own wound — *this is my sickness; I have forgotten you.* The remedy is to remember. Intentionally, deliberately, to rehearse God's character and recount his works. And when we do, something shifts in the soul.

*Lord, I was so busy feeling sorry for myself that I forgot to remember you. You are good. You are holy. You are great and mighty and powerful. And you care. You remember, and therefore you save. Thank you, Father. How could I have forgotten?*

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## Your Footprints Were Unseen

The psalm closes with a poetic retelling of one of the most dramatic moments in Israel's history — the night God led his people through the Red Sea. But this retelling is more than a recounting of ancient events. The psalmist seems to be doing something personal with it, using the exodus as a lens through which to see his own life and his own experience of God's deliverance. Read it that way as I read it aloud — not merely as a description of what happened at the Red Sea, but as a description of what God has done, or is doing, in your own life:

*When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled. The clouds poured out water; the skies gave forth thunder; your arrows flashed on every side. The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lighted up the world; the earth trembled and shook. Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

And there it is — the line that brings the whole psalm into focus. *Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen.*

God was in the water with his people. He was walking the path ahead of them. But his footprints could not be seen. His presence did not announce itself with obvious, visible marks. He was there — leading, guiding, carrying — but the evidence was hidden to the eye.

This is also a picture of our own salvation. The God who walked through the sea for Israel is the same God who walked through death for us. His way was through the grave, his path through the tomb — and yet his footprints were unseen until the stone was rolled away. We have a God whose steadfast love never ceases, whose mercies are new every morning, who forgives all our sins, who does not forget his people. And yes — sometimes his footprints are unseen. But unseen does not mean absent. Unseen does not mean he is not there.

The psalm ends simply: “*You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.*” The good news we carry tonight is that we have one who is greater than Moses and Aaron. His name is Jesus. He is the shepherd of our souls, gentle and humble in heart, good and faithful. He has conquered death. He is preparing a place. He is holy and just and he is present in your pain, even when — especially when — his footprints cannot be seen.

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## **The Hound of Heaven**

I want to close tonight with a word from another poet. Francis Thompson was an alcoholic and a drug addict who spent years on the streets of London, utterly lost, running from God. From that experience he wrote one of the most extraordinary poems in the English language, “The Hound of Heaven.” He described what it felt like to flee from God through years of darkness — and to discover, looking back, that he had never been alone, that behind him all along came those strong, invisible feet, following, following after:

*I fled him, down the night and down the days; I fled him down the arches of the years; I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears I hid from Him, and under running laughter. Up vistaed hopes, I sped And shot, precipitated, Down Titanic glooms of chasmed fears, From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.*

The footprints were unseen. But the feet never stopped.

Whatever you are carrying tonight — whatever depth you are crying out from — trust him. His way is through the sea. His path is through the great waters. And though you cannot always see where he has walked, he has walked there ahead of you.