

# *Pursuing God*

## In Step with the Psalms

### Lesson 10: Psalm 77

## How to Overcome Anxiety and Depression

### *Stay on the Path ~*

During dark circumstances it is very hard to hold onto the hope of a brighter day. Whenever the path of life leads into the lowest valley, the soul's closest companions are often that of sorrow and suffering, and at times even depression and despair. No one's course is permanently detoured away from the valley, sooner or later all roads lead there. David reminds us in Psalm 23 that the path to the valley does not end there; rather it goes through to the other side. While in the valley, God protects and guides with His own presence, bringing delight and peace to the soul in distress.

Here is Psalm 77, Asaph writes of a time of great personal suffering during which, much like David, he finds comfort and encouragement. Asaph reflects on a much earlier act of God on behalf of His people—the exodus from Egypt—one of Israel's finest hours. In pondering this monumental victory over the tyranny of Pharaoh's slavery, Asaph receives renewed faith and rejoicing to face his own distress.

For Asaph, glancing back at God's mighty deliverance of His people awakened in him the assurance that the Lord wants to be part of our everyday lives. The common people we read about in scripture are a mirror of the ups and downs we experience and how God uses our circumstances to show us He is indeed there. Moments of reflection on our journey can become *stones of remembrance* that we too pick up and look at whenever we need a lift or a reason to keep going.

### *Did you know ~*

Psalm 77 fits into the category of *lament psalms*, which comprise the biggest portion of the Book of Psalms. These are *occasional poems*, composed out of a specific circumstance or situation, covering a variety of topics. The elements of a lament psalm can appear in any order and are sometimes repeated more than once in the poem. These elements most often consist of: a cry to God, a specific lament or explanation of the crisis, a prayer to God, a statement of faith, and a declaration of praise.

## Psalm 77

### The Consoling Memory of God's Redemptive Works

To the Chief Musician. To Jeduthun.  
A Psalm of Asaph.

1 I cried out to God with my voice—  
    To God with my voice;  
    And He gave ear to me.  
2 In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord;  
    My hand was stretched out in the night  
        without ceasing;  
    My soul refused to be comforted.  
3 I remembered God, and was troubled;  
I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed.  
    Selah

4 You hold my eyelids open;  
I am so troubled that I cannot speak.  
5 I have considered the days of old,  
    The years of ancient times.  
6 I call to remembrance my song in the night;  
    I meditate within my heart,  
And my spirit makes diligent search.

7 Will the Lord cast off forever?  
And will He be favorable no more?  
8 Has His mercy ceased forever?  
Has His promise failed forevermore?  
9 Has God forgotten to be gracious?  
Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?  
    Selah

10 And I said, "This is my anguish;  
But I will remember the years of the  
    right hand of the Most High."  
11 I will remember the works of the Lord;  
Surely I will remember Your wonders of old.  
12 I will also meditate on all Your work,  
    And talk of Your deeds.  
13 Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary;  
Who is so great a God as our God?  
14 You are the God who does wonders;  
    You have declared Your strength  
        among the peoples.  
15 You have with Your arm redeemed  
    Your people,  
    The sons of Jacob and Joseph.  
    Selah

16 The waters saw You, O God;  
The waters saw You, they were afraid;  
The depths also trembled.  
17 The clouds poured out water;  
The skies sent out a sound;  
Your arrows also flashed about.  
18 The voice of Your thunder was  
in the whirlwind;  
The lightnings lit up the world;  
The earth trembled and shook.  
19 Your way was in the sea,  
Your path in the great waters,  
And Your footsteps were not known.  
20 You led Your people like a flock  
By the hand of Moses and Aaron.

(Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.)

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

**Read Psalm 77.**

### *Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions*

What is the *tone* of Psalm 77? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

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The mental record you have of God's previous work on your behalf is a storehouse of faith-building moments that you can access and bring to the forefront in the present or future, whenever you need to remind yourself that He cares. Briefly record one such moment when God intervened to help you. How did knowing He was there make a difference for you?

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*Put a psalm in your heart* ~ (Memory verse) **Psalm 77:11–12**

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

*I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of Your deeds.*

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*Learn the lessons of the psalm* ~

*Selah* (Think about):

Asaph left a written record for the reader of a time of great discouragement when God met him, teaching us that God continues to see, know, hear, and answer when we seek Him.

*I. Desperate times call for persistent prayer and reflection.*

Days of trouble should be marked by times of persistent prayer to God. Such times must be considered by the believer an occasion to *look up—lean in—and listen attentively* to what God says in His Word.

1. Jot down the descriptive words you find in verses 1–6 depicting Asaph's personal anguish.

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2. Now look at verses 1-6 for the words or phrases that describe Asaph's pursuit of God in the midst of his distress.

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Restless, sleepless, speechless, as Asaph continued to become more desperate in seeking God, his soul refused to be comforted. He sought the Lord but could only groan within himself, finding no relief from his suffering.

Overwhelmed and discouraged instead of uplifted and encouraged, in verses 7–9, Asaph fires off a series of questions that he already knew the answers to: *Will the Lord reject forever? Will He never again show His favor? Has He forgotten to show mercy? Has His promise failed forever? Has he forgotten to be gracious? In anger has He withheld His compassion?* Of course the answers to all of the above is a resounding “No!” but the psalmist had allowed himself to think of God in these negative tones and it led him to begin to believe his own doubts. The perspective is reflective of Asaph's depressed state, but these unsettling questions would soon prompt the remembrance of God's faithfulness in earlier times.

### *Pause & ponder ~*

Disappointment, discouragement, and depression can, if allowed to persist over time, radically affect not only your perspective of God but prompt doubts about your faith in Him. That is why it is vitally important for you to carve out consistent disciplined daily time with the Lord. If you say you've never doubted Him, then you're probably not being honest with yourself. Watch how Satan will use your difficult seasons to cause you to doubt God's love and compassion. During these low times the Holy Spirit is faithful to put a check in your heart and point out that you are headed down the wrong road. When He does, you need to stop . . . *refocus your attention, redirect your thoughts, and renew your confidence* in what God has done for you!

Personal: Are you currently going through a trial that has undermined your confidence in who God is or has caused you to doubt His love for you? Briefly share a few details below.

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When in doubt—search Him out! Go to the Word of God to find out the truth about God. Don't yield to despair; search the scriptures for comfort. Take time to pause and ponder the passage found in Romans 8:31–39. Answer the following:

- What do these verses say about your relationship with God? Can anything separate you from His love?

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- What does this make you? v. 37 How should this truth affect your perspective today?

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## *II. Decide today to take control of your thought life and self-talk.*

Jesus Christ did not come to give us overcoming life—but life to overcome! The key to overcome your anxiety and depression is within your reach.

In verses 10–15, Asaph comes to the turning point of the psalm, acknowledging his situation and at the same time offering his hope in God's acts on behalf of His people in the past.

1. What does Asaph determine to remember? v. 11
2. What does he meditate upon and purpose to talk about? v. 12

Asaph speaks of God's ways as holy—in the sanctuary (v.13). Again he asks a rhetorical question but this time it is positive: *Who is so great a God as our God?* It is an honest acknowledgment that God's will and His ways are without error, perfect and holy. His power is unlimited; with His own arm He had *redeemed—delivered* or *rescued*—His people (vv. 14–15).

## *Touchpoint~*

In order to practice the Lord's presence you must learn to let go of negative unpleasant thoughts that cause you to doubt and even turn away from Him. Replace them with the truths found in His Word. The Bible is very clear about how we can control our *thought life* and *self-talk*. We may not be able to control our circumstances but we can control how we handle our circumstances! Try looking up the references below to see what difference they can have on your perspective and your choices when navigating through a difficult situation. Note your findings.

2 Corinthians 10:3–5

- a. What do these verses say about the believer's warfare and our weapons?
- b. Because we fight a spiritual battle, we fight against everything that exalts itself against the knowledge of God by bringing every thought into captivity—*taking it captive*—to make that thought obey Christ. That responsibility is *yours*! Remember that the next time you begin to doubt, as doubts tend to become strongholds over time.

Philippians 4:8

- a. Immediately let go of negative thoughts when you recognize you're entertaining them. Replace them with the kinds of thoughts found in this verse—list all eight of them below.
- b. Notice the command at the end to *meditate on these things*! Keep meditating on them and make them a part of your mental (self-talk) and verbal conversation so they become your automatic default when needed.

- c. Okay, now let's get personal for a moment . . . what negative thought(s) have you allowed to take hold of your mind and heart? List them in the space provided.
- d. What part do these thoughts play in the spiritual battle you are waging at this moment? (Think about how they may be undermining your faith and trust in the Lord.)
- e. Will you take these thoughts captive right now by bringing them to the cross of Christ, acknowledging them and letting them go? Do it now.
- f. Which thought(s) from Philippians 4:8 will you use to replace the negative ones and erase your doubts?

### *Pause & ponder ~*

Asaph singles out one act from Israel's past history to reflect on and speak about God's greatness—that of the Exodus from Egypt. Pause and ponder the account in Exodus 13:17–22; and 14:1–31.

Using poetic form in Psalm 77, Asaph describes the parting of the Red Sea, the first miracle following the Israelite's departure from bondage. Note the response of nature to God's command in each of the following verses:

a. The waters (v. 16):

b. The clouds (v. 17):

c. The skies (v. 17):

(Note: Lightning is depicted as *arrows* in vv. 17–18)

d. The earth (v. 18):

Try to picture in your mind the sheer terror of the moment, as God unleashed His mighty power. Though there appeared to be no way, His path led directly through the Red Sea, which parted for His people to cross. God's *footsteps* or *footprints* were not visible but the tremendous power of His hand was evident to everyone as they all crossed safely on dry ground with their enemy in hot pursuit!

## *Live the psalm ~*

You may be going through a “Red Sea” experience of your own right now—the enemy is fiercely pursuing you while up ahead you see no possible way out! Don’t look at the magnitude of the waves overwhelming you or the depth of the pain . . . instead **look to God**. He alone knows the way you take and when He has tried you, you will come forth as gold.

Document where you are at this time; what you remember about God’s faithfulness to you; and make note of any changes you see in the coming weeks.

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## *Pray the psalm ~*

“Tears have a tongue, and grammar, and language that our heavenly Father knows.” (Samuel Rutherford) You may think that no one knows or understands the depth of your pain, but God knows and cares. Trust Him with your fears; write down what concerns you the most and lift it to Him in prayer.

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