

DON'T PULL BACK....PRESS IN

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Scripture: Psalm 102

Psalm 102

A prayer of the afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the Lord.

¹ Hear my prayer, O Lord!

And let my cry for help come to You.

² Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my distress;

Incline Your ear to me;

In the day when I call answer me quickly.

³ For my days have been consumed in smoke,

And my bones have been scorched like a hearth.

⁴ My heart has been smitten like grass and has withered away,

Indeed, I forget to eat my bread.

⁵ Because of the loudness of my groaning

My bones cling to my flesh.

⁶ I resemble a pelican of the wilderness;

I have become like an owl of the waste places.

⁷ I lie awake,

I have become like a lonely bird on a housetop.

⁸ My enemies have reproached me all day long;

Those who deride me have used my name as a curse.

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 lengthened shadow,

And I wither away like [k](#)grass.

¹² But You, O Lord, abide forever,

And Your name to all generations.

¹³ You will arise and have compassion on Zion;

For it is time to be gracious to her,

For the appointed time has come.

¹⁴ Surely Your servants find pleasure in her stones

And feel pity for her dust.

¹⁵ So the nations will fear the name of the Lord

And all the kings of the earth Your glory.

¹⁶ For the Lord has built up Zion;

He has appeared in His glory.

¹⁷ He has regarded the prayer of the destitute

And has not despised 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 His holy height;

*From heaven the Lord gazed upon the earth,
20 To hear the groaning of the prisoner,
To set free those who were doomed to death,
21 That men may tell of 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 has weakened my strength in the way;
He has shortened my days.
24 I say, "O my God, do not take me away in the midst of my days,
Your years are throughout all generations.
25 "Of old You founded the earth,
And the heavens are the work of Your hands.
26 "Even they will perish, but You endure;
And all of them will wear out like a garment;
Like clothing You will change them and they will be changed.
27 "But You are the same,
And Your years will not come to an end.
28 "The children of Your servants will continue,
And their descendants will be established before You."*

Heavenly Father, unpack this psalm for us, that we may be able to apply it to our own hearts and our situations and allow it to be a pathway of renewal for each one of us. We pray in Your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.

At the very first reading of this psalm, we can see that it's a deeply emotional and poignant psalm. It's a psalm of an afflicted person who's troubled with sorrow and despair. Traditionally, this psalm would fall under the penitential psalms. And there are seven of those in the whole body of the Psalms: Psalm 6, 32, 38, 51 (probably the best known – the prayer that David made as he came out of that sinful time with Bathsheba), 102, 130 and 43. And all these psalms cover a range of emotions from deep sorrow and guilt of sin to the confident hope in God's forgiveness and redemption.

And here in the 102nd psalm, the Psalmist begins with a desperate plea for God to hear his prayer. "Hear my prayer, O God," and to respond quickly in his time of distress. And then the middle section of the psalm talks vividly of the psalmist's pain – comparing his fleeting life to withering grass and his isolation to that of a lonely bird. Yet, despite this overwhelming sorrow, the psalm takes a significant turn as the Psalmist shifts focus from his own suffering to the eternal and steadfast nature of God. It's kind of a pivot as we go through vs. 12-22.

Then he ends in the latter part of the psalm by saying that the sovereign faith is what we must hope in. The psalmist remembers God's enduring sovereignty and His promises to Jerusalem, expressing hope that what God did there will restore His people, and then vicariously for each one of us as well, to be able to know that we have a restorative God. The God who is faithful and will ultimately bring deliverance and renewal.

So the psalm is a pretty powerful example of how to bring one's deepest hurts and pains and adverse situations to God while also holding on to the hope and trust in God's eternal and unchanging nature.

As we explore and unpack this psalm a little bit, I want us to look at our own lives – the pain and the uncertainty, the adverse situations that we may be going through, situations that are so difficult, situations that make us feel so alone, situations that we don't seem able to control. And then, allow this psalm to inform us, to touch and bring healing to our souls.

I. THE REALITY OF PAIN AND HUMAN SUFFERING.

Suffering for each one of us is a reality. Sometimes when we go through difficult times, nobody else understands that we are going through a difficult time, probably because of the façades that we put on. But the suffering that we go through is real.

He starts with, "Hear my prayer, O Lord." Lord, in this situation that I am in, would You listen to me? I desperately need You to hear me. There's this sense of urgency to it. There's always that sense of urgency when we go through difficult times, because many people around us may not know where we are or even empathize with us. And it can get lonely. So there's an urgency that we have when we go to God and say, "Lord, would You at least hear me? Would You at least see what's going on in my life?"

The psalmist describes his suffering in such vivid terms. He says: "My days vanish like smoke; my bones burn like embers. My heart is struck down like grass that withers." Then he feels as isolated as an owl in the waste places. And he ends by saying: "I feel like a solitary bird on a rooftop." I couldn't go past that phrase – a solitary bird on a rooftop – picturing this little house and a bird perched on top all by itself in the midst of desolation all around. And sometimes that's exactly how we feel when we're going through a difficult situation. We feel so alone that even though we may be in a crowded room or in a crowded place, we feel like this bird sitting lonely on top of a house in the midst of absolute abandonment and desolation.

That's where the psalmist is; that's where we could be today. Every time God lays a message like this upon my heart, I know that He's speaking specifically to you today, and that you're not here by chance. You didn't happen to roll in here on this Sunday morning. God brought you here because He wants to touch you with His word. Always, when I have this kind of message, I know that there's going to be a release of God's presence in beautiful, refreshing, renewing, comforting ways for some of you here who are going through exactly what the psalmist is talking about. These are such vivid descriptors of loneliness and pain and helplessness in situations that seem to be beyond our control.

When we look at adversity that may surround us at times, which may be surrounding some of you here, there are five possible ways that we could respond to it. I want to take the time to share it with you because I want the Word to draw you out of where you could be, to the place where the psalmist wants us to end.

1) Emotional Response:

There's a certain sense of anxiety, of fear even, that begins to envelope us as we face uncertainty or adversity, or are in a difficult or unknown situation. And it can be so unsettling that there's anxiety and fear that begins to come upon us. Or this prolonged loneliness that we may feel can lead to sadness or even depression. This feeling of hopelessness that may sometimes envelop us. It could also lead to anger; anger towards God, anger towards people, anger towards the situation that we find ourselves in that comes from the frustration of saying, "Even if I want to handle it, I cannot handle it." And so, anger becomes a response.

2) Cognitive Response:

This refers to the kind of thoughts that we begin to think as we look at the situation that has enveloped us. How do we interpret it? how do we analyze it? What do we make of it? those thoughts can be so debilitating, because one of the things that happens is that as we begin to think about a situation, we then begin to get into a loop. Rumination takes place. And all we can think about is this whole situation going round and round and round in our minds. It doesn't allow us to do anything else. We just get lower and lower in the way we feel, because we are constantly thinking about this particular issue. And along with that comes uncertainty and self-doubt. We begin to check ourselves in other situations as well. Where we would have been confident, now we are diffident. We begin to second-guess ourselves, and say, "Am I having a right response here, or am I not?"

3) Behavioral Response:

Various ways we may behave:

- Withdraw – from people, isolate ourselves, get off from all social interactions.
- Seek support, to seek people – family, friends and others for comfort and advice.
- Avoid the situation altogether. Put your head in the sand and hope that the situation goes by.

4) Physical Response:

Adversity can take a toll on your body. stressors can begin to cause trouble with pressure and sugar levels and so on, as studies have found out.

5) Spiritual Response:

We are children of God going through difficult times. So, we look to God and we begin to question: Are You really there? You said You'll never leave me; have You left me? You said You will answer, but the heavens are eloquent in their silence. There's nothing that I hear. Are You there? Are You in the midst? Do You know what is happening to me? We begin to respond in ways like this that are unhealthy for our own spiritual walk.

Any one of these responses can add to the situation negatively, if we choose the negative path that these responses offer.

COPING WITH THE SITUATION

We can draw some practical lessons from the psalmist.

- **Acknowledging our pain.** The psalmist has no problem in telling God exactly how he feels. I love the psalms because they are so guttural. They come from within. The psalms allow us to say, "Lord, where are You? If I'm Your child, and You're my father, how is it that I feel like this? How is it that I'm strained so emotionally? How is it that I'm struggling with this situation?"

I always picture being able to go to God and just vent, to let Him know what I'm going through. It's like a little child coming to a parent and saying "Why? Why? Why?" and then punching the parent. The parent just holds the child until the child is spent and says, "I haven't left you. It's okay. It's alright. I've got you." I believe God is the same, that when we look at Him and we say, "Lord, this is going on for so long. Lord, it doesn't seem like I have the strength left for anything more."

We need to be able to take our pain to the Lord. Acknowledge our pain! So often, instead of doing that, we move away from Him. We isolate ourselves. And that's the worst place to be, to disconnect ourselves from God. He always is our lifeline. Always! He's the One who never lets go. Unless you choose to take your hand out of His, He will not let go. "Nobody can pluck you out of His hand," the Word says. Sometimes we willingly take away our hand and say, "I'm going to handle this by myself."

- **Take it to the Lord**

I don't know where each of you are, beloved, but as I was preparing this message, I felt as if the Lord was saying: Pause! Pause! And just allow each one of you to turn to the Lord and bring that thing that has been weighing so heavily on your heart and cry out to Him. "Lord, are You aware of what's going on in my heart? What's going on in my life? Are You aware of the situation, the circumstances?"

Just bring your situations to the forefront of your own lives and let's take a moment and take those situations to the Lord. Cry out to Him. Take your pain to Him. Address it.

O Lord, hear our cries for help. Don't hide Your face from us. This is our day of distress Lord; would You incline Your ear? Answer Lord, quickly for my heart is heavy. Situations and circumstances seem to be overwhelming. I have no strength left.

II. THE ETERNAL NATURE OF GOD AND HIS COMPASSION.

This is the second part of the psalm, 13 verses from vs. 12-22. It seems like the psalmist suddenly does a pivot and says, "Okay, I'm turning away from my situation and I'm going to gaze upon the face of God." And in his lament, he says, "But You, O Lord, are enthroned forever. You are remembered throughout all generations." He contrasts his own frailty with the eternal nature of who God is. He acknowledges that while human life is fleeting, God is eternal, and that He is a God of compassion.

Have you ever allowed that word to settle upon you – that God is a God of compassion? Imagine He is looking down upon you, and His eyes are filled with compassion, with loving kindness. The kindness of God rests upon you. That's how God looks at you, empathetically, vicariously saying: I am in there with you, like I was with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. I haven't stopped being in fiery furnaces; I continue to be there with My children. The psalmist is saying, "This eternal God, this God of compassion, is who I turn and gaze upon.

And he says, "In doing that, I find the ground to move forward." What is that ground? That ground is hope. Hope comes when we turn our attention to God and all that He can bring into the equation of our lives. every attribute of God then becomes available to His children as we turn our attention to Him. The psalmist says, "He looks forward to a time when everybody will revere God's name because of who God is."

And so beloved, we too bring our situations to Him. How do we do that? We too shift our focus. We turn away from those things that are crushing us and turn and look at Him, focusing on His eternal nature, His past faithfulness. And we shift our perspective from despair to hope. As long as we are in our situation, it's a desperate place to be. God is anchored in him; hope begins to arise. So, we shift our focus from despair, from our situation to God and allow despair to move to hope.

And we trust on how deeply God cares for each one of us. In Exodus 2, there are such beautiful words that God has chosen to give to each one of us.

Exodus 2:23-25 "Now it came about in the course of those many days, that the King of Egypt died, and the sons of Israel groaned because of the bondage. And they cried out, and their cry for help because of their bondage ascended to God. So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them."

Did you hear this? God say, God heard, and God took notice of them. Why? Because their cries in their bondage came up to Him. Similarly, even as you cried out to Him, God has heard, God has seen where you are, and God has taken notice.

III. OUR FRAILTY AND GOD'S STRENGTH AND ETERNAL, UNCHANGING NATURE.

In this third part of the psalm, from 23-28, we reflect on two things: the frailty that envelops us, and then the strength and the eternal, unchanging nature of God.

The psalmist says, "He has broken my strength in mid-course. He has shortened my days." Yet, even in this acknowledgment of his mortality, there is a reaffirmation of God's unchanging nature. He says, "Of old, You laid the foundation of the earth and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish. Heaven and earth may fade away, but God will remain eternal. But You are the same and Your years have no end."

What is our way forward?

The first thing is to be able to not only embrace our limits, to know exactly what we can do in a particular situation. And when we can't do anything, when it seems like we've exhausted all of our resources, to remember that God hasn't even started with His resources, and to turn to Him. As Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 12:9, that in our weakness, His strength is made perfect. We throw that verse around so often. But think about it for a minute. When you've reached the end, you have nothing more. You're just sitting there saying, "I've reached the end of my tether; there's nowhere to go." And suddenly, the eternal God is saying to you, "That's fertile ground now for me to showcase My strength." Our weakness is where His strength begins to pour in. and that's why it's so good for us to always recognize when we are weak and completely done. Because it's in those moments that God's strength begins to pour into our lives.

The psalmist ends with something that is so beautiful. He says what God has done in our lives will be a testimony for future generations. It doesn't end with us. that, even as He does something, as He brings us out of this place that we are in, onto solid ground, this becomes a testimony that will encourage future generations as it is doing right now.

So beloved, this psalm is just a powerful reminder that in our deepest moments of suffering, we are not alone. God hears our cries, understands our pain, offers us His eternal hope. As we navigate through life, as we move alone, we need to be able to find strength in the knowledge that while our situations may be beyond our ability to change them, God's ability to lead us through it never changes. It is always there that He will take us through it.

The psalmist leaves us with 3 things:

- Bring our laments, our cries for help to the Lord,
- Shift our focus to His eternal nature,
- Trust in His promises to be able to take you through to a better future.

Let me leave you with Romans 8:28.

Paul writes, "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes."

Beloved, you are His children, you are disciples of the Most High God. You love Him, and to you, God is saying that situation that you think is so overwhelming right now, I'm going to turn it into good. and one day, you will look back and say, "Look what the Lord did in my life." So I want to leave you with just five words in closing; five words as you come to these kinds of situations in your lives and where you may be right now. DON'T PULL BACK ... PRESS IN.
