

WHY DOESN'T
GOD
ANSWER ME?

Trusting in Times of Doubt and Trial



Ray Stedman



introduction

Why Doesn't God Answer Me?

Trusting in Times of Doubt and Trial

s it possible that we have been misled into thinking we can solve our problems with prayer? What could be more important than knocking harder on the door of heaven when God seems to go silent in the midst of our requests?

In this excerpt from *Psalms: Folk Songs of Faith*,

Ray Stedman suggests that prayer may not be the first thing to do when we are in trouble. This experienced pastor even admits that more prayer may not give us the peace of mind or answers we are looking for.

So what should we do when we don't know where else to turn? The following pages will show us how to renew our strength when all we feel is our own weakness and fear.

Mart DeHaan

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MANAGING EDITOR: J.R. Hudberg

COVER IMAGE: © Jorgen McLeman via Shutterstock.

COVER DESIGN: Jeremy Culp

INTERIOR DESIGN: Steve Gier

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Printed in USA



one

In Times of Doubt

Psalm 77:1-12

Many psalms were written to help people struggling with doubt. Psalm 77 is not an idealistic presentation of why we don't need to doubt. It is the story of a man who is nearly driven to despair because it seems that God refuses to respond to his prayers. This psalm shows how we as believers—and yes, sometimes doubters—can move from despair to a renewed and deepened faith in God.

Psalm 77 opens with a distressed cry: "I cried out to

God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands, and I would not be comforted. I remembered you, God, and I groaned; I meditated, and my spirit grew faint" (vv. 1–3).

We don't know what problem Asaph was dealing with, but he cried out to God about it. He begged and groaned and pleaded to the point of exhaustion—his spirit was faint. Sorrow and disappointment threatened to crush him. Though he tried to focus on the Lord's goodness, he simply could not find comfort.

He continued: "You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak" (v. 4). He tried to sleep, but his eyelids would not stay closed. He was so disturbed that he couldn't even describe his problem to others. Asaph is in the throes of grief, and there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel. In his desperation, he holds nothing back. His words are blunt and to the point.

It's easy to think that problems should go away because we are Christians: *Now that I'm a Christian, my faith will solve every problem, relieve every doubt.* But Psalm 77—and all the Bible—suggests something to the contrary. Even with faith, life is still full of problems and doubts. ▀



The history of God's people is a lengthy record of tragedies, catastrophes, problems, pain, and, yes, doubt.

↪ No one understood grief and confusion better than **Jesus**. Think of His agony in the garden in Gethsemane. There He cries out to God, saying, in effect, “If at all possible, let this horror, this awful cup, pass from Me. Yet, let it not be as I will, but let Your will be done” (SEE LUKE 22:42). Later, on the cross, in His agony and loneliness He wonders, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (MATTHEW 27:46). If Jesus knew such intense inner struggle over God’s will for His life, He certainly understands how we can feel perplexed.

It is unrealistic to imagine that the Christian life, that any kind of life, can be lived without pain and doubt. The history of God’s people is a lengthy record of tragedies, catastrophes, problems, pain, and, yes, doubt.

Asaph does two things in response to his pain and doubt: He prays and he meditates. Even so, his pain continues unabated and his confusion settles even deeper. His problem is exacerbated by God’s silence.

It’s hard enough to endure affliction, but if our faith collapses under the pressure, we lose not only *our current* battle but *all* our battles. Faith helps us navigate the stormy and uncertain waters that threaten to capsize us.

That’s the temptation the psalmist faces. He has tried prayer, but prayer doesn’t seem to work. He has tried meditating on God’s Word, but that too leaves him empty. His problem is that he is relying on prayer and meditation as techniques—and problems cannot be solved by techniques.

A Disturbing Conclusion

This psalm unmasks the glib and superficial advice we often give one another in times of trial and

discouragement. We see a person whose heart has been ripped out, and what is our response? "Pray about it," we say, "and meditate on the Word."

Such advice is not wrong, but it's virtually useless. Prayer (as we will see later in the psalm) is not the first thing to do when we are in trouble. Does that surprise you? Does it seem almost blasphemous? Yet Psalm 77 assures us that it is so.

Asaph thought prayer would solve his problems. But prayer was never designed for that purpose. God designed prayer as an instrument of intimacy between Him and us. We make a serious mistake when we reduce prayer to a technique.

If we advise someone in distress to "pray about it," and that person has prayed and received no answer from God, then we have not really helped. Encouraging what seems to be a pointless activity may tempt someone to simply give up on their faith, thinking, "Faith doesn't work. God doesn't respond to prayer."



God designed prayer as an instrument of intimacy between Him and us. We make a serious mistake when we reduce prayer to a technique.

↪ *When we pray, we often expect God to answer in an immediate and miraculous way that matches exactly what we have asked for. However, Scripture shows that God often answers prayers in ways we do not expect (SEE 2 CORINTHIANS 12:8-9).*

"Muddling through" a time of doubt isn't good enough. We can't just sit by and wait for a time when our faith is not shaken and weak. We want to understand. We need to know what's happening and why. The truth is simple, if difficult: God allows painful experiences in our lives because through them we grow and learn. If we do not find God's solution to our trials of doubt, our faith may not survive.

In Psalm 77, Asaph comes perilously close to a precipice. He is ready to slide into unbelief. Desperately hoping to shore up his faith, he reflects on the past: "I thought about the former days, the years of long ago; I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit asked" (vv. 5–6).

Asaph remembers God's goodness and past blessings. He remembers the songs and psalms he sang in past nights of pain. Surely this will bring clarity and comfort.

Unfortunately, even as he remembers the "good old days" and his songs in nights past, his spirit insistently asks questions. The doubts assailing his mind refuse to be silenced. And his doubts all spring from the *same* question: "Why doesn't God answer me?" This nagging question drags him to the depths of despair: "Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?" (vv. 7–9).

These are understandable questions. We ask similar questions in our times of confusion: "If God has blessed me in the past, then why doesn't He bless me now?"

What's different? Why do I feel forgotten and abandoned? Has His mercy come to an end? Is He angry with me?"

Finally, the questions, doubts, and silence lead the psalmist to a terrifying conclusion: "Then I said, 'It is my grief, that the right hand of the Most High has changed'" (v. 10 NASB).

In other words, "I've prayed all night long. I've searched my heart, analyzed my situation, and I can't answer these questions. There's only one conclusion: God has changed. I can't count on Him."

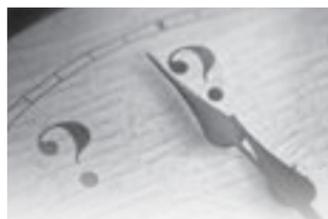
With that thought, Asaph faces the real possibility of losing his faith. The foundation of his faith—God is always the same—is crumbling beneath his feet. What can save him from his crisis of doubt?

The Terrible Thought

The psalmist is peering over the brink into unbelief. He has concluded that God can change—only a small step from believing something terrifying: God is not really God.

After all, if God can change, then He is nothing more than a manlike being with godlike powers. God's unchanging character is essential to the psalmist's understanding of who God is. If God can change, if He can be unloving and unjust, then God is not really God.

But Psalm 77 takes a turn at verse 11: "I will remember



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the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds" (vv. 11–12).

Suddenly there is a radical shift in Asaph's approach to the crisis of doubt. His fear and despair vanish and he has a new sense of confidence and peace which he expresses to God. ▶

▶ *In verses 1–10, Asaph had been talking to himself, posing his rhetorical questions to the air. However, in verse 11, he begins to address God directly.*

The psalmist steps back from the precipice, turns around, and moves in the opposite direction.

This monumental shift does not come because Asaph's doubts are finally vanquished. His decision to believe in God's love and justice is not emotional or intellectual; it's a determination made purely with his will. He makes a choice to step back from unbelief, and that choice saves him.

Asaph's actions model something we need to learn: We don't need to be afraid to face our doubts squarely. The Bible is true. God is alive and strong enough to withstand our honest inquiry.



We don't need to be afraid to face our doubts squarely.

Examine the Scriptures, and I believe you'll come to the same conclusion as the apostle Peter. In John 6, Jesus made some difficult statements to His disciples. At that

point many of them left Him. When He saw the crowds leaving, Jesus turned to His 12 closest friends and said, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Peter answered: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (JOHN 6:67–68).

So it was with Asaph. His doubts had driven him to a terrible conclusion. He stood at the edge of unbelief and stared down but resolved to continue believing that God is God.

The Place to Begin

We cannot live in an unresolved state of tension between faith and doubt. Ultimately we must come down on one side or the other. If we fail to settle our questions of faith, doubts will pull on us until we tumble into the abyss of unbelief and become enemies of faith.

Asaph began by thinking about God: "I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds" (vv. 11–12).

Notice the psalmist's first (and repeated) words, "I will." Those two words indicate that a decision has been made and a course of action will be taken. His feelings will no longer control him. His head, not his heart, will determine his course. With that decision, the psalmist stops focusing on himself and his circumstances and starts focusing on God.

Here is where we find out what to do when we are faced with trouble. Our response should not be prayer! Prayer is *not* the first thing to do when we are in trouble.

We are to meditate on God. Make sure we understand Him. ▀ Focus on God Himself before praying about our hurts, our needs, our feelings, and our petitions.

▀ *Inexact **notions of God** are part of the common human experience. Because we are finite and He is infinite, it is impossible to have perfect and complete knowledge of Him. But inexact does not necessarily mean inaccurate. Nor does it mean that God is unknowable.*

Let's be honest, our tendency is to pray first, ask God to resolve all of our problems with a wave of His hand, and then meditate—if we meditate at all—waiting for God to come to the rescue. When we pray before we meditate, we pray about our problems, our suffering, our anxiety, and our worries. We put ourselves at the center of our prayers: "I'm in trouble! I'm in pain! I'm depressed! Save me from my problems, God!"

Instead, we need to learn to meditate on God. We need to think about His nature, the wonder of who He is, and His activity in history and in our own lives. Then when we pray, God takes center stage in our prayers instead of ourselves. Meditating on God changes the way we pray. We focus on who God is, what He is like, and what He can do.

"God, You are the Lord of my life and my problems. You are holy and merciful. You are unchanging and dependable. You are all I ever need in life."

Now we begin to see what Psalm 77 is all about. The psalmist begins by describing a natural view of his problems. He prays from a natural and self-centered mindset. He begins with the thought, "See how afflicted I am! See how

I cry out and nothing happens!"
When we put ourselves at the center, emotions take over and our mind is governed by our feelings.

But when the psalmist's perspective changes in verse 11, his prayer changes as well. Instead of focusing on his pain in self-pity, he focuses entirely on God. This shift contains profound psychological insight. Psalm 77 begins with a man enslaved to his emotions. His anxiety and despair color his outlook on his problems as well as his outlook on God. His emotions have brought him to the brink of a collapse of faith. But when the psalmist decides to take himself out of the center of his prayers and put God there instead, his perspective changes and the difference is dramatic.

If we begin by praying about our problems and our feelings, we limit our thinking. But when we begin with God, we start with a God who knows no limits. He is the Creator of the universe and the Author of life. All knowledge and truth are His. By focusing on Him instead of ourselves, we remove unnecessary limitations from our thinking and our prayers. The inconceivable becomes possible when we begin with God.



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Explaining the Silence of God

Before we leave the opening verses of Psalm 77, there is still a question that needs an answer: "Why didn't God

answer?" The first verses of this psalm don't record just the moments leading up to Asaph's change in perspective. Verses 1–10 give the indication of an ongoing struggle and of a prolonged silence from God.

In one sense the answer is as obvious as it is shocking: God was silent because He chose to be. His silence was intentional.

Would God deliberately ignore our pleas for help? We know that He is loving and merciful. It seems like a violation of His nature for Him to treat us with silence just when we need Him most.

Why would God deliberately allow anyone to go through such a time of trial, doubt, and despair? Because God wants us to have a deeper faith. Times of trial and doubting are part of the process that make us grow spiritually strong and wise. ▶

▶ *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything* (JAMES 1:2–4).

If God always responded instantly to our cries for help, we would remain spiritually immature, forever mastered by feelings and moods. Our prayers would always be self-centered rather than God-centered. Our outlook would remain natural, not spiritual.

We will never reach spiritual maturity if God always responds to us the instant we call upon Him. We will never achieve mature faith and Christlike character as long as our trust in God is subject to our moods,

emotions, and circumstances. God hides Himself at times so that we will grow to become more like Christ.

If you are going through a trial and God seems silent, know that despite how it feels, He is there with you, hurting and weeping with you. He is also helping you to grow in your character and your faith. Through this painful experience, you are learning lessons that cannot be learned any other way. God's silence does not signal His absence or His disinterest.

Soon you'll be able to rejoice with the psalmist and say, "I will remember the deeds of the LORD!" You have God's Word on that.



two

Through the Deep Waters

Psalm 77:13-19

The event that defined Israel as a nation was the exodus, when God led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. This event established Israel's identity for all time. The book of Psalms continually refers to the time God brought the plagues upon Egypt and then miraculously opened the Red Sea and led the Israelites to safety and freedom. God fed them during their journey, leading them

by a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night.

The details of these events were well-known throughout the ancient world. After a time in the desert, when the people of Israel came to the edge of the Jordan River and were about to enter the Promised Land, they found that word had spread—the inhabitants of the land were already terrified of them—and this paved the way for Israel to take over the land.

It's possible that Asaph was thinking about the exodus when he wrote: "I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds" (PSALM 77:11–12).

As Christians, we too can reflect on God's amazing deeds and remember the works of Jesus and His miracles. We can meditate on His teaching, healing, and raising the dead, as well as His work of dying on the cross and rising from the grave.

The apostle Paul testified to this same historical heritage before King Agrippa when he said of the death and resurrection of Jesus, "None of this has escaped [the king's] notice, because it was not done in a corner" (ACTS 26:26). The historic fact of the death and resurrection of Jesus was a well-attested event that many people witnessed and knew of. The risen Lord didn't appear to only one or two people but to dozens, and to



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over 500 people at once on one occasion. These people all testified to the resurrection. ▀

▹ *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born (1 CORINTHIANS 15:3–8).*

God has acted in history. The story of Jesus is not a myth. God became flesh and lived among us, was crucified, and rose again. The Bible is grounded in history. Christianity would never have survived if it were based on lies. The resurrection is the central fact of human history. We can say along with the psalmist, "I will remember the deeds of the LORD."

The Greatness of God

The psalmist goes on to tell us what will result when we meditate on who God is and what He has done: "Your ways, God, are holy. What god is as great as our God? You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples. With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph" (vv. 13–15).

Our faith will stand firm as long as we are convinced of the two towering truths the psalmist expresses here: God is holy and God is great. Asaph is filled with a sense

of awe regarding the perfection, majesty, and power of God.

We like to celebrate our own greatness. We think we are powerful because of technological advances like nuclear power, space exploration, and iPhones. But how does this power compare with the power of God?

Our sun works on the same principle as nuclear power—generating energy by fusing the nuclei of hydrogen atoms. But did you know that our sun unleashes the equivalent of 100 billion nuclear bombs every second? What's more, the sun, 300,000 times the size of planet Earth, is just one of about 100 billion stars in the Milky Way Galaxy, which is just one of more than 100 billion galaxies in the known universe! In other words, at any given instant of time, God's universe is unleashing trillions and trillions of times the energy of humans' most powerful invention!

The next time you think of human greatness, remember the greatness of a God who could create such a universe as ours. It helps to keep things in perspective.



Remember the greatness of a God who could create such a universe as ours. It helps to keep things in perspective.

The Reality of Miracles

The psalmist writes: "You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples" (PSALM 77:14).

Some skeptics argue in a complete circle: "There is no God, so there can be no miracles. Since there are no miracles, there is no God."

But this kind of thinking is begging the question. It's the fallacy of basing a conclusion on an unproven assumption. You can't logically say, "Miracles can't happen; therefore miracles have not happened." You first have to *prove* that miracles can't happen.

If we look at the events of the Bible as a record of eyewitness accounts given by honest, sincere men and women, then the Bible constitutes strong and convincing evidence for miracles.

The God of the psalmist is a God who created a universe out of nothing, a God who leads a nation out of bondage by taking them through the depths of a parted sea. This same God breathed life back into the dead. He is a God who displays His awesome power. It is precisely because these events are supernatural that people find them convincing evidence of the reality of God.

The God of Redemption

Asaph makes another profound observation about the deeds of God. His works are not simply great; they are redemptive. God did great works that saved His people. Asaph writes, "With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph" (v. 15).

The word *redeem* means to restore, to buy back something that has been lost. I can't redeem you from your sins. I can't even redeem myself. Redemption is God's special work, and everything He does in our lives

is focused on our redemption, on restoring us to belong to Him.

The miracles of the Bible are redemptive. The miracles God did in Egypt redeemed the people of Israel from bondage and moved them to a place of usefulness for God in the Land of Promise. The miracles Jesus did in the Gospels—the transformation of water into wine, the healings, and the feedings—were all designed to impress people with a truth that would transform their hearts: Jesus is the Messiah.

The miracle of the resurrection was, of course, the most redemptive miracle of all, for it was the supernatural event that made it possible for us to be saved from sin and death. In the crucifixion and resurrection, God paid the price for our redemption. He bought us back from the pawnshop of sin and death, and He restored us to relationship with Him.

Everything in the life of our Lord Jesus focused on redemption. The apostle Paul wrote, “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 CORINTHIANS 8:9). Note the phrase “for your sake.” That is an expression of our Lord’s redemptive love. For us He left heaven and became poor. For us He was beaten and crucified.

“God made him who had no sin to be sin *for us*, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (5:21). God the Father made the Sinless One, Jesus, responsible for our sin, and He paid the penalty for sin in our place so that we could be redeemed. Jesus



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was crucified and raised so that we might be set free from sin. Scripture tells us that at this very moment Jesus is interceding for us in heaven—again, for our sakes! As we read in Hebrews, Jesus “is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” (7:25).

Notice that the psalmist writes, “With your mighty arm you redeemed your people” (PSALM 77:15). No one is redeemed without

their knowledge or against their will. Redemption is for God's people, for those who respond to His invitation and act upon His Word.

The proclamation of God's redemptive love demands a response. The book of Hebrews tells us, “Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (11:6).

You might say, “But I don't know if God exists. I can't find Him. How can I believe in Him if I don't know if He is real or not?” Answer: Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. That is always the promise of Scripture. If you sincerely and earnestly seek Him, you will find Him. Those who truly want to find Him will do so.

Are you responding to God's redemptive call? Or are you sitting in sullenness, waiting for God to do something

to you in spite of yourself? With His mighty arm, He has redeemed His people. He is still redeeming His people today. Seek Him, draw near to Him, and respond to His invitation¹ so you can say with the psalmist, "What god is as great as our God?" (PSALM 77:13).

↪ *The Gospels record Jesus often extending this **invitation** to people and capture His sorrow at the lack of response. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing" (LUKE 13:34).*

The Thing You Fear

This psalm opens with a cry of doubt and despair. But the psalmist has traced his way to faith and triumph. Now in the closing lines of Psalm 77, he writes: "The waters saw you, God, the waters saw you and writhed; the very depths were convulsed" (PSALM 77:16).

The psalmist returns to that pivotal event in Israel's history when God parted the Red Sea and led His people out of Egypt.

Asaph recognizes God's control over all human activities and over nature: The waters of the Red Sea saw God and trembled in fear before His might. This is a moving poetic image of how the waters responded to the mighty power of God.

Imagine the fear of the Israelites when they reached the edge of the sea. The Egyptians were close behind and the impassable sea loomed ahead. Their situation

seemed hopeless. Yet the very thing that closed off their escape, the thing that virtually ensured their death or enslavement—the water of the sea—was afraid of God!

God commanded Moses to stretch out his staff, and the sea parted. The waters stacked up on either side, held back by the hand of God. The Israelites went down into a dry channel between the waters. They were afraid of the waters, but the waters were afraid of God. The sea didn't dare touch those whom God protected. In the psalmist's poetic imagery, the water saw God, and it writhed and convulsed in fear.

The very powers and forces that frighten us are themselves under the command of God. The thing you fear fears Him.

Through the Depths of the Sea

Next the psalmist tells us that the forces of nature are nothing but instruments in God's hands. He writes: "The clouds poured down water, the heavens resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth. Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked" (PSALM 77:17–18).



The sea didn't dare touch those whom God protected. In the psalmist's poetic imagery, the water saw God, and it writhed and convulsed in fear.

If you have ever been through an electrical storm, you know what the psalmist is describing: the soul-shaking roar of thunder, lightning flashing across the heavens like fiery arrows, the earth trembling in response. All of these forces are under God's command. No power, natural or human, can operate except by permission of the Almighty.



*All of the world's
forces, systems,
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control.*

In the last hours before Jesus went to the cross, forsaken by His friends, betrayed by Judas, and denied by Peter, Jesus stood alone and seemingly powerless before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. When Pilate questioned Jesus, the Lord gave him no answer. Exasperated, Pilate asked Him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? . . . Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above" (JOHN 19:10–11).

All of the world's forces, systems, and authorities are under God's control. All power belongs to God. Nothing can touch us without the permission of God Himself.

Asaph goes on to say: "Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen" (PSALM 77:19).

The people of Israel didn't know where God was leading them, but God had prepared the way. He knew what He was doing. As the psalmist ponders this

miraculous event, he discovers a second great truth: The fact that we don't understand what God is doing does not mean He isn't at work.

This is a difficult concept to wrap our minds around. We want God to explain all of His plans and actions. And unless God constantly reassures us, we fret and panic, just as the Israelites did when they reached the edge of the Red Sea.

In Exodus 14 the Israelites were camped in the desert near the sea when they saw a cloud of dust and heard the thunder of horses' hooves and chariot wheels. Pharaoh's army was coming. The people cried out to the Lord; then they panicked and blamed Moses for their peril. "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" (vv. 11–12).

The people of Israel had lost faith in Moses and in God. Moses had to give them a pep talk: "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today" (v. 13).



***"Do not be afraid.
Stand firm and
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EXODUS 14:13

If we had been in their sandals, would we have reacted differently? In desperate situations haven't we prayed, "Lord, there's no way out! I'm trapped! Why don't You do something?" I confess that I have prayed that way many times. That is not a prayer of faith. That's a prayer of panic.

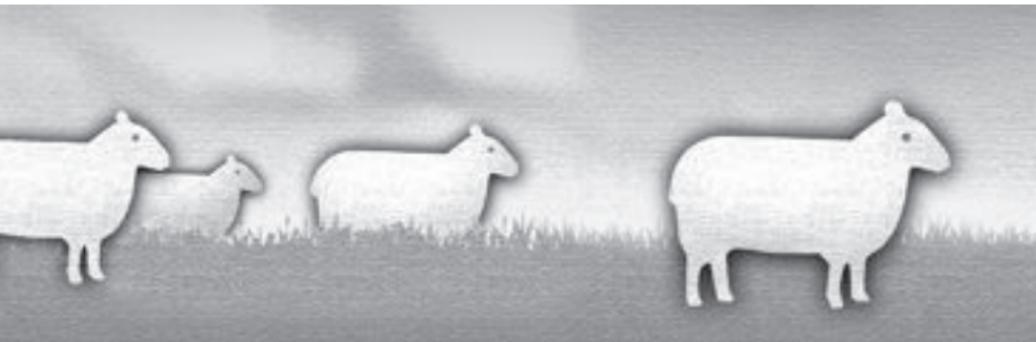
What the people of Israel didn't understand and couldn't imagine is that this was part of God's plan all along. His plan of deliverance never even entered their minds!

Though His footprints were unseen, God knew exactly what He was doing.

This is a principle we all need to remember in those times when hope is fading and there seems no way out of total disaster. We need to place our confidence in Him, trusting that He has a plan that is perfect. We can't imagine what God will do, but we can trust that whatever He does will be the best thing for us; and in the end, it will be amazing!



We need to place our confidence in Him, trusting that He has a plan that is perfect.



three

The Shepherd of His People

Psalm 77:20

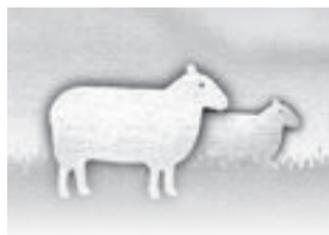
The final truth the psalmist discovered was this: The Lord is the Shepherd of His people. He writes: "You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (PSALM 77:20).

Is there any figure of speech so beautifully descriptive of the relationship of God to His people than that of a shepherd with his flock? The closing verse of Psalm 77

reminds us of the opening verse of Psalm 23: "The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing." Because the Lord is our Shepherd, He leads us and supplies everything we need.

What does the Lord supply to His sheep? First, He supplies a sense of meaning and purpose for our lives. A shepherd always has a goal in mind for the flock. If he leads his sheep to the mountain pastures, it's because he has something he wants to accomplish there. If he leads them beside the still water, he has a reason for doing so. If he leads the sheep out into the territory of the wolves, it's because he wants them there. It's the shepherd who supplies the purpose.

Meaning is an essential ingredient of life. A man once came to me for counseling. He said, "I have everything I want, but I don't want anything I have." He was suffering from "destination sickness," the feeling of having achieved all of his life goals only to find that none of his achievements brought him peace and satisfaction. God, our Good Shepherd, supplies us with meaning, purpose, and a reason for living. He makes life worthwhile.

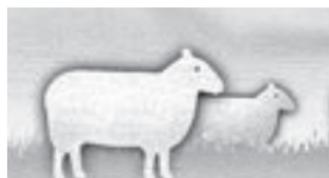


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Second, the Shepherd supplies love, another desperate need in our lives. Our Lord loves His sheep. He gives us everything that love entails: caring, protection, and provision. As the apostle Peter writes, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 PETER 5:7). We matter to Him. He cares about our needs. That is the heart of a shepherd.

Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd, and He said that what defined Him in that role was His self-sacrificing love for the sheep:

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep (JOHN 10:11–15).



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Whenever we feel abandoned or neglected by God, we need to remember that He is our Shepherd. We are always in His protective

care, even when we are not aware of it. God always shepherds His own. That's the conclusion the psalmist comes to.

Have you come to that same conclusion? Are you able to trust God, even through times of doubt and pressure, trial and temptation? Have faith in God! He will lead you through the deep waters and bring you safely to the other shore. Once there, you'll be able to say with the psalmist, "Your ways, God, are holy. What god is as great as our God?" (PSALM 77:13). 🌿



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