

Psalm 102

This is a psalm written by a suffering believer. It seems a little like something that Job would write; except for his knowledge of Mount Zion. Mount Zion had not yet become a worship center in Job's days. What kind of life situations create this kind of a sense of urgency in our lives? *"My baby is choking!"*, *"Somebody is trying to hurt me"*, *"I just was told that I have cancer"*, etc.... Whatever the case may be, all other chatter in my mind takes a back seat.

I often wonder how valuable a visit is to those who are feeling badly. Will this stopover just add to their hassles? In reality; it is affirming to know that friends are praying for you. A visit from a friend on your *bed of languishing* can be a shot in the arm.

Is all of this suffering and testing just a long-term lesson and form of discipline? Probably not. God does not waste any energy. Even the most-faithful followers have a continual course correction requirement. We all continually veer off of the road. God's discipline is prescriptive; and designed to improve our lives. Negative reinforcement is a common theme for bad behavior. The message is clear that there is always a right and wrong way to proceed. We can improve the quality of life with mere faith. For example, our daily anguish is often over our perceived outcomes. Those fears rarely play out. God usually rescues us in the natural events of the day. If we had a little more faith and insight, we could conclude up front that God is driving; and that this mess will work out if we keep our heads down and get on it.

Read Psalm 102:1-7: The psalmist has no quality of life. There are diseases and situations that drag us down. We really cannot even think about other things when we are *under siege*. There are certain pain and stress thresholds that seem to just block out our ability to focus, or carry on like normal. His body is damaged. His energy is gone. His attitude is bleak. He is depressed, feverish, emaciated and nauseous. This condition has just wiped him out. Sometimes things are so tough that the question is not about getting through the day. It's about getting through the hour. A depressed and hurting person will long for the day to be over; because there is nothing to look forward to.

Our zeal for life, desire for interaction and interest in others just evaporates when we don't feel well. He says that his days are *consumed like smoke*. Days come and go and vanish into thin air without us noticing. We tend to mark time by anticipated events. His calendar is uneventful and unnoticed because there are no highlights. A person in depression does not look forward to tomorrow. He is just trying to escape today. He

expects tomorrow to only bring disappointment and pain. I can recall a season of life when I only expected evil tidings. I cringed when the phone rang; because chances were that it was unwelcomed news. It is very hard to go through life having nothing to look forward to.

He adds that his bones *burn like a hearth*. He is feverish. Our body becomes uncomfortable when we are fighting a fever. He also feels the stress of his condition in his heart. He is running on reserves.

His bones cling to his skin. Depression, nausea and feverishness can take away our appetite. He is emaciated. We all want to lose a few pounds; but there is a danger of becoming too weak when you stop eating.

What does he mean, by saying that he is *like a pelican in the wilderness*.? That does not even seem like a naturally-occurring place for a sea bird. The word for pelican or cormorant comes from the root word *to vomit*. Pelicans regurgitate predigested fish onto the nest floor for their nestlings, later switching to whole fish once the young are big enough. In other words; the psalmist is saying that he cannot keep his food down. Eating meals can be a simple pleasure of life. Losing that small moment of satisfaction is difficult.

He says that he is like an *owl in the desert*. Owls are night birds. The psalmist is unable to sleep. He adds that he is also like a *sparrow on a rooftop*. The word for sparrow comes from its flitting or swooping and rising pattern of flight. This poor guy cannot find a comfortable place to rest. He is up and down in discomfort. He is also like a sparrow on the rooftop; removed from everybody. Feeling poorly will make you irritable and anti-social.

Read Psalm 102:8-11: Enduring poor health is bad enough; but the psalmist has other problems as well. He is hated. It is uncomfortable to have people who are committed to bring you down. I even feel very uncomfortable when I don't like someone and they know it.

Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. (Matthew 5:25)

If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty,

give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:18-21)

His life is turning into a bad memory. He did not like this chapter of life; and his associates did not care for him either. What do you do when you are in spiritual warfare? You don't feel well. Every decision seems to be wrong; or another step backwards. I have heard that the best thing that you can do is just stand; and honor God. Our faith is tested when times are good. We might be completely confused and holding our ground against: *who knows what*. Our faith is tested when times are good and when bad. *Is God still a good driver; or am I heading for a crash?* How bad does his driving have to get for me to grab the steering wheel again? Remember that these situations never are as bad as they seem like they will be. The question is at what point do I panic and lose trust in God?

How much does the approval of others matter to us? Are we comfortable following God when all of our loved ones don't? That is part of our training. We also need to realize that we are only responsible for a prayerful best effort. If it all goes badly, that is on God to rescue us.

Read Psalm 102:12-24: We now contrast the groaning of the prisoners to sin to the praises in the new Jerusalem. The two story lines could not be more different. They just do not seem to go together. In fact; it is not uncommon for a chapter of scripture to include the misery of men and the glorious life in heaven.

Why do the psalms normally begin with some poor soul in trouble; and then it switches to *camera 2*, where all is well in heaven? It seems to be incongruent and interrupts the thought process. If we are focused on God, and building his kingdom...and helping people our problems fade away. Our story is always going to have drama and disappointment...no matter how faithful we are. We were not built to live life independent of God and his purposes. There is no amount of satisfying things that we can stuff in ourselves to make that shallow lifestyle feel good. Hiding from God makes us feel twice as bad, If we pursue God; all of that other stuff comes together neatly for us.

People try to bury their despair and dissatisfaction in good feelings. That can come from alcohol, drugs, accomplishments or forbidden relationships. Like any piece of chocolate cake. You can only take so much before it makes you sick to your stomach. You cannot lie to yourself. We need to understand that our body is lying to our mind...and our imagination is driven by our unhealthy desires.

Read Psalm 102:25-28: God made the earth to be a blessed place for man to live. Sin has brought on the second law of thermodynamics (everything is wearing out and growing dimmer).

Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: “Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:17-19)

We are currently dismembering our own blessings; and nature reflects this. The more our world falls apart, the more we are moved to turn to God.

*Behold, the Lord makes the earth empty and makes it waste, Distorts its surface And scatters abroad its inhabitants. And it shall be: As with the people, so with the priest; As with the servant, so with his master; As with the maid, so with her mistress; As with the buyer, so with the seller; As with the lender, so with the borrower; As with the creditor, so with the debtor. The land shall be entirely emptied and utterly plundered, For the Lord has spoken this word. The earth mourns and fades away, The world languishes and fades away; The haughty[*a*] people of the earth languish. The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, Because they have transgressed the laws, Changed the ordinance, Broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, And those who dwell in it are [*b*]desolate. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, And few men are left. The new wine fails, the vine languishes, All the merry-hearted sigh. The mirth of the tambourine ceases, The noise of the jubilant ends, The joy of the harp ceases. They shall not drink wine with a song; Strong drink is bitter to those who drink it. The city of confusion is broken down; Every house is shut up, so that none may go in. There is a cry for wine in the streets, All joy is darkened, The mirth of the land is gone. In the city desolation is left, And the gate is stricken with destruction. When it shall be thus in the midst of the land among the people, It shall be like the shaking of an olive tree, Like the gleaning of grapes when the vintage is done. They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing; For the majesty of the Lord They shall cry aloud from the sea. Therefore glorify the Lord in the dawning light, The name of the Lord God of Israel in the coastlands of the sea. From the ends of the earth we have heard songs: “Glory to the righteous!” But I said, ‘I am ruined, ruined! Woe to me! The treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously, Indeed, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously.’ Fear and the pit and the snare Are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth. And it shall be*

That he who flees from the noise of the fear Shall fall into the pit, And he who comes up from the midst of the pit Shall be caught in the snare; For the windows from on high are open, And the foundations of the earth are shaken. The earth is violently broken, The earth is split open, The earth is shaken exceedingly. The earth shall reel[ε] to and fro like a drunkard, And shall totter like a hut; Its transgression shall be heavy upon it, And it will fall, and not rise again. It shall come to pass in that day That the Lord will punish on high the host of exalted ones, And on the earth the kings of the earth. They will be gathered together, As prisoners are gathered in the pit, And will be shut up in the prison; After many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be disgraced And the sun ashamed; For the Lord of hosts will reign On Mount Zion and in Jerusalem And before His elders, gloriously. (Isaiah 24)

The point of this psalm is that man has always tried to find peace of mind without God. That state does not exist. We are merely a thought of God. We have no life or pleasure outside of our purpose.