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CHANGING DESPAIR TO PRAISE

By Pastor Marc Heinz

You know at various times in our lives most of us will experience fear, discouragement, loss or loneliness. Believe it or not, sometimes even Christians feel such things. In fact there may be times in our lives when we are so discouraged or hurt that we're tempted to wonder if God even knows or cares about our situation.

In Psalm 77 the Psalmist, Asaph, was having one of those moments. He was in anguish. He felt discouraged and alone. He was hurting and it would seem that he was about ready to throw in the towel and give up. Listen to the first ten verses:

My voice rises to God, and I will cry aloud; My voice rises to God, and He will hear me. In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; In the night my hand was stretched out without weariness; My soul refused to be comforted. When I remember God, then I am disturbed; When I sigh, then my spirit grows faint. Selah. You have held my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I have considered the days of old, The years of long ago. I will remember my song in the night; I will meditate with my heart, And my spirit ponders: Will the Lord reject forever? And will He never be favorable again? Has His lovingkindness ceased forever? Has His promise come to an end forever? Has God forgotten to be gracious, Or has He in anger withdrawn His compassion? Selah. Then I said, "It is my grief, That the right hand of the Most High has changed."

These verses paint a picture of dis-

trepreneur and anguish, as Asaph searches his heart for answers. All he can do is think about the past when things were better. And his sleepless nights and searching spirit produce no resolution or answers, only agonizing questions that strike at the very heart of his faith. It's as though he has become so discouraged that he can't even pray and his attempts at prayer give way to anguished meditation. The meditation culminates in wrenching questions and we see the apparently hopeless conclusion that God has changed. Now look at verses 11-20.

I shall remember the deeds of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will meditate on all Your work, And muse on Your deeds. 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 strength among the peoples. You have by Your power redeemed Your people, The sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah. The waters saw You, O God; The waters saw You, they were in anguish; The deeps also trembled. The clouds poured out water; The skies gave forth a sound; Your arrows flashed here and there. The sound of Your thunder was in the whirlwind; The lightnings lit up the world; The earth trembled and shook. Your way was in the sea And Your paths in the mighty waters, And Your footprints may not be known. You led Your people like a flock By the hand of Moses and Aaron.

I find it fascinating to see how quickly Asaph goes from the brink of

despair to a sort of calm hope. So what happened? What changed? How do we account for this sudden transition. I believe the change occurs as he is reminded of who and what God is. This is reflected as his speech changes from "I" in verses 11-12 to "You" in verse 14. Do you see what happened? As he began to think about God rather than himself and his situation, things started to come into focus. And as He recounted all that God had done in the past he regained hope for his own present situation and for the future. So the key to Asaph's sudden change was the fact that he began to think about and remember God.

Do you have pictures of your loved ones in your wallet or purse? How about the walls or your refrigerator? Why do you do that? I know why I have pictures of my wife and family on my desk, I have a need to remember those I love. In a similar way, we all have a need to remember God, as well as the things He has done on our behalf. Thinking about what God has done in the past will not only encourage you, but it will strengthen and help revive your faith during difficult or lonely times.

It seems to me that one of the nation of Israel's greatest problems was short term memory loss; i.e., they were guilty of forgetting what God had done on their behalf in the past. You know when it comes to remembering what God has done in the past, we too, like the Israelites have a tendency to quickly forget. Think about it? How long after God has helped you through something painful or difficult experience do you

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