

Community Group Discussion Guide: December 1, 2024
Psalm 77:1-20: We Get To Be Weak; He Gets To Be Strong

MOTIVATE

⇒ *Starter Question: What worship songs have been a source of comfort for you over the years and why?*

Optional Activity: Enlist volunteers to write insecurities, doubts, or lies they believe on a whiteboard or a piece of paper. One by one, read these out loud, then find Scripture that combats those feelings and read it out loud.

⇒ *Why is it hard to discern between feelings and truth?*

⇒ *How should we respond when our feelings don't match God's truth?*

DISCUSS

Psalm 77, in Book Three of Psalms, is categorized as a Lament Psalm, which express an intense longing to hear from God (see *Psalms Overview* for more information). Written by Asaph to the choirmaster, this song was also associated with Jeduthun, a prophetic musician and Levite in the service of King David (1 Chronicles 25:11). Asaph was a Levitical priest and a chief worship leader. He wrote twelve psalms: Psalm 50, 73-83. Enlisted initially by King David, Asaph was the father of a clan of musicians who served throughout the history of the tabernacle and the temple.

In Psalm 77, Asaph or one of his descendants, cried out to God during a time of suffering. The root of his anguish could be attributed to the fall of Jerusalem and the remaining desolation, or it could be a personal struggle with doubt. Either way, he wrestled with the character of God and the disappointment he felt regarding his circumstances.

The beauty of the psalms is that they show us we can bring every emotion to God--even the ugly ones. We do not have to sort out the messiness before engaging in prayerful conversation with our Father. In Psalm 77, we will see the psalmist unburden himself before the Lord. As he releases those burdens, God graciously reminds him of truth. Though the circumstances do not change, the psalmist's heart and mind are at ease when resting in the faithfulness of God. David Platt says it this way, "We get to be weak; He gets to be strong."

⇒ *Do you find it hard to bring your full self to God? Why or why not?*

Psalm 77:1-3: *1 I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me. 2 In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted. 3 When I remember God, I moan; when I meditate, my spirit faints.*

Asaph jumped right into his distress. There were no platitudes or false pretenses. He started by saying, "I am crying, weary, and weak. I receive no comfort when I think about God." In ancient Hebrew culture, the physical posture was an outward manifestation of inner feelings. Often individuals tore their garments to express inner pain. Here, Asaph physically stretched his hands out toward God, desperately reaching for an answer.

In this psalm, we are confronted with a type of honest suffering that often makes us uncomfortable. Many of us feel afraid to tell God that we are weak. It may feel irreverent to groan before the Lord. When we face suffering we push away doubts and fears and try to bandage our pain through cliches like, "God gives His toughest battles to His strongest soldiers," or "Everything happens for a reason." Instead of truly unburdening before the Lord, we cling to threads of false hope. In contrast, Asaph shows us that there is no emotion or thought God cannot handle.

- ⇒ *Can you describe a moment in your life where you felt similarly to Asaph?*
- ⇒ *What prevents you from coming to God transparently?*

Psalm 77:4-9: 4 *You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak. 5 I consider the days of old, the years long ago. 6 I said, "Let me remember my song in the night; let me meditate in my heart." Then my spirit made a diligent search: 7 "Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? 8 Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? 9 Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?"*

Asaph tried to remember the days when he worshiped God joyfully, described as his "song in the night." He meditated on times when God showed favor to Israel. But he could not keep his spirit from asking hard questions as he endured his current suffering. Again, Asaph did not beat around the bush; he went straight to the hard-hitting questions: Did God use up all of His favor previously? Has He forgotten His steadfast and covenantal love? Will He forsake His promises and stop being gracious? A literal translation of verse eight says, "Has he closed up his womb in anger?" This is a figurative expression denoting an absence of parental love and care.

Conversely to Asaph's questions, in an act of love, God allowed him to continue expressing his doubts. Asaph had not hardened in his skepticism enough to anger God, as he was genuinely looking for answers to his questions. It is not a sin to question God and it does not offend Him when we seek answers to our doubts. We see David and Jesus ask similar questions in Psalm 22:1 and Matthew 27:46. It is through the questioning that we can know and love God more. The fight of faith is to discern the difference between our feelings and truth.

- ⇒ *What are some questions or doubts that you wrestle with?*
- ⇒ *How do we bring our questions to God without sinning?*

In the next verses, Asaph combatted his doubts by remembering God's faithfulness in the past. We have the gift of Scripture to aid us in this, too. We can know the answers to Asaph's questions.

- Has God rejected us? No, He is faithful to His Word (Lamentations 3:31-33).
- Will He ever again show favor to Israel? Yes, God will restore the nation (Isaiah 60:1-22).
- Has His unending love vanished forever? No, His love is everlasting (Jeremiah 31:3).
- Have His promises failed? No, God cannot lie (Numbers 23:19).
- Has He forgotten to be gracious? No, God remembers His children (Isaiah 49:14-18).
- Is He so angry that He has shut up His compassion? No, His mercy is new every day (Lamentations 3:22-24).

- ⇒ *How does anchoring to Scripture sustain your faith?*

Psalm 77:10-15: 10 *Then I said, "I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High." 11 I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. 12 I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. 13 Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God? 14 You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples. 15 You with your arm redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph.*

Rather than ending his prayer with his questions, Asaph persevered in prayer and began to reflect on what God had done in the past for His people. The phrase, "I will," indicates that Asaph chose to continue to trust God. It's important to note that this wasn't Asaph "getting it together" or taking a "fake it 'til you make it" mentality. Because Asaph was desperately depending on God, he had a spirit-empowered faith to continue trusting Him, even when it was hard.

The “right hand” means the power by which God works. Asaph was reflecting on God’s acts of power. The phrases “wonders of old” and “mighty deeds” are often used when describing the exodus of God’s people from slavery in Egypt. This is the key event of the Old Testament that proves God’s might and power. It also stood as the litmus test for future events.

If God could redeem His people, these “children of Jacob and Joseph,” from slavery and preserve them through the wilderness, then there was nothing He could not deliver them from in the future. As Asaph processed through God’s deeds, he switched pronouns from “I” and “my,” to “you” and “your.” God lifted Asaph’s perspective from his circumstances onto His unchangeable character, which allowed Asaph to continue fighting the fight of faith.

- ⇒ *What are some “wonders of old” in your life that you can point back to as evidence of God’s goodness and faithfulness?*
- ⇒ *Does focusing on God instead of ourselves mean we ignore our feelings? How can lifting our eyes onto Him actually help us process our suffering?*

Psalm 77:16-20: *16 When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled. 17 The clouds poured out water; the skies gave forth thunder; your arrows flashed on every side. 18 The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lighted up the world; the earth trembled and shook. 19 Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen. 20 You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

Asaph continued reflecting on God’s mighty works, including descriptions of His power shown through nature. The Israelites had seen several examples of this already (Exodus 9:22-26; Exodus 19:9-20; Numbers 16:1-40; Joshua 3:14-17; 1 Samuel 12:18), but none greater than the parting of the Red Sea. God’s “way” (*derek* in Hebrew) is the determination and exercise of His divine will. God willed for His people to walk on dry ground across the bottom of the Red Sea. This was not the easiest way to escape an army, but it proved God was with the Israelites and that He was protecting them.

Asaph often used flock or herd imagery to show God’s compassionate care towards His people. Memories of God’s miracles and His kindness sustained Israel through difficulties, and it did the same for Asaph on an individual level. The psalm ends here, resting on the truth of God’s power and faithfulness. What a beautiful reminder that we can bring our full, broken, hurting self to God, yet still receive His mercy and compassion.

- ⇒ *Has God ever taken you “through the sea,” meaning that He did not take you the easy route? What did you learn about Him during that season?*
- ⇒ *Why does God sometimes choose the hard way to reveal Himself or His character?*

TRANSFORM

1. Make personal application: The psalms show us we can bring our full selves to God. Whether we are joyful, distraught, apathetic, or curious, God gives us space and mercy to bring it all to Him. We have this incredible access only through the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Without Jesus, we have no audience with God. He rescued us, clothed us in righteousness, and intercedes on our behalf.

We have a God who sees us and listens when we pray (2 Kings 20:5; 1 Peter 3:12). We don’t have to live a life of relying on our own strength. Christianity is not for the strong, but for the weak. It is through desperate dependence on God that we find healing and comfort. Through vulnerability we also help build community that is centered on the life-giving hope of Jesus. The world doesn’t need more religion or a church full of hypocrites that pretend they never have any problems. The world needs to see believers casting their cares on the Lord and

resting in the peace that only He can give (1 Peter 5:7; Philippians 4:7). Believers do not have to be afraid of weakness, for when we are weak, God is strong (2 Corinthians 12:9-11).

- ⇒ *Do you believe God actually hears your cries? Why or why not?*
- ⇒ *Charles Spurgeon once said, “I have learned to kiss the waves that throw me against the Rock of Ages.” What does this mean to you? Is it hard for you to be grateful for suffering? How can you begin to trust God in the midst of extreme suffering?*
- ⇒ *How can you practically display vulnerability that points to the restoration of Christ within your Christian and non-Christian circles?*

2. Pray: Mimic Asaph’s prayer in your own words. Confess your doubts to God and share your sufferings with Him. Ask God to hear your cries and show compassion. Praise Him for His acts of faithfulness in your life. Thank God for Jesus, who gives you an audience with the Father, and ask Him to strengthen your faith. Pray for courage to be honest with the Lord, your community, and non-believers, so that all might come to know and love the Lord.

Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- *Christ Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Psalms 51-100* (2020), pages 247-253.
- *Christian Standard Study Bible* (2017), pages 884-885.
- *English Standard Version Study Bible* (2008), pages 1143-1145.
- *Life Application Study Bible New International Version* (1997), pages 987-988.
- *Wiersbe Bible Commentary, Old Testament* (2007), pages 958-959.