

Psalm 77

God Is Great. God Is Good. Life Is Not.

The Summit Church

MPT: In a time of great despair and affliction, Asaph finds relief by remembering, pondering, and meditating on God's wonderful works of delivering power and grace.

MPS: When God seems silent and distant, confidence is found by praying honestly and remembering God's ways found in God's word.

INTRODUCTION

My name is Curtis...Happy Thanksgiving...*number of servings?*

- I have so much to be thankful for...my family, this church...
 - Church Appreciation Tour
- Thanksgiving always reminds me of **TRADITIONS**...

DINNER PRAYER: God is great, God is good...

CHURCH: God is good...all the time...

We say these out of tradition but we don't ever really stop to think, **"Do I really believe this?"**

- Sure, God is great, God is good...**but what about when life is not?**
- Yes, God is good, all the time. And all the time, God is good...**but what about when he's not?**
- Does God really feel good ALL the time in my life? Does God *really* seem great and good and loving and kind ALL the time?

Not to be a Grinch, but every single person listening right now is either **going through** something, **just got out of** something, or is **eventually heading into** something, right? If you **have not** or are not already, every single one of us will be faced with questions about God like:

- If he's so great, then why is he letting this anxiety take over my life?
- If he's so good then why did I just spend Thanksgiving with one less loved one at the table?

- God doesn't *feel* great in the middle of this divorce.
- God doesn't *feel* great when the teenager that I have spent 16 years praying and pouring into has decided to abandon any semblance of morals and godliness.
- Then you come to church and expect to be comforted and we're here talking about how God is doing "big things," when you would be happy for **God to just do something...** anything would be fine!
- **Everyone** has had—or will have at some point—the experience of *"Where is God? Is he really good? Why won't he do something about what I'm going through? Why is he silent in the midst of my situation?"*

The title of my sermon today is: **God Is Great. God Is Good. Life Is Not.**

Here's the question today: How do I have **confidence** in God when he seems silent in my situation?

- (The word 'confidence' literally means "with faith." How do I live life **"with faith" in God** when what I'm **experiencing** in my life doesn't match up with what I **believe** about my God?)
- *What do you do when what you **see with your eyes** is different from what you **believe in your heart**? How do I have **confidence** in God when he seems silent?*

OPEN YOUR BIBLE to **Psalm 77** where I want to look at a Psalm from a guy named **Asaph** who asks these same questions. Here's what you need to know about Asaph:

- Boys with King David... (high maintenance, skinny jeans)
- He was a **worship leader** (used to leading God's ppl in praise)
- **Wrote a number of Psalms**...but rather than always being full of **praise** often they were full of **pain**.
- What we'll see here is that he's a guy going through a time of great **despair** and **affliction**, yet he manages to find **relief in God** even when he doesn't get a **response from God**.
 - (I thought about titling this sermon *"I'm going through something..."*)

So I want to look at Asaph's strategy **for** fighting **discouragement** and **doubt** and **darkness**...I want us to see how Asaph has confidence (faith!) even when God seems silent.

Psalms 77 – Let's stand in honor of the reading of God's Word.

Psalm 77

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; (*say 'remember'*)
when I meditate, my spirit faints. *Selah*
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?" *Selah*
How do you believe God is good when life is not? Here it is...
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. *Selah*
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.

PRAY: IOUS

CONTEXT

I don't know about you but it is **so easy** for me to **see myself** in this Psalm...especially those first nine verses.

Which isn't surprising considering the simplest description of the Psalms is that they were the **inspired prayer-and-praise book** of Israel. The Psalms are **revelations of truth**, not abstractly, but **in terms of the human experience**.

W/o even knowing it, that's why so many of us love reading the Psalms...because **when you read the Psalms you see yourself**. You see **your situation**. The experience of the psalmist is **your experience**. And **that is no accident**. God put the Psalms in the Bible not only to call us to great heights of **praise and worship**, but also to comfort us in very dark seasons of **discouragement and doubt**. Asaph is a guy

who had been to the **highest of mountaintops** and to the **lowest of valleys**.

- We may **enjoy**, and **experience**, and **brag** on God on the mountaintops; but we learn to **trust**, and **obey**, and **know him intimately** in the valley.
- On the mountaintop I love to praise him for the *what*; but in the valley I get to praise him for *who* he is.

In Psalm 77, Asaph is in the valley...and what he sees is an **absent God** who seems **unconcerned** and **silent in the midst of Asaph's suffering**. Yet somehow, by the end of this Psalm – even when nothing in his circumstances had changed – he managed to have confidence in God.

I believe this Psalm shows us two ways to have confidence in God even when he seems silent...

How to have confidence in God when he seems silent:

1) Be Honest with God through Prayer (vv1-10)

Notice I didn't just say "pray," but rather to pray honestly.

(v1) I cry aloud **to God**, aloud to God, and he will hear me.

There are two key words here in v1 – "**to God**" – and this is so important...because in the day of trouble Asaph didn't go and **complain to his friends**, or try to numb his situation by **partying**, or ignore it by sinking himself into his **work**. He PRAYED to God. Being afflicted, Asaph prayed. Yes, he was full of complaints – loud complaints – **but he directed them to God**, not to men, and turned them all into prayers.

- Summit family, **days of trouble must be days of prayer**...especially when God seems to have gone silent on

you. In those times we must diligently seek him until we find him.

Listen, God has thick sin – he's a *big boy*. He can handle your **complaints** and **questions**.

"Doubts are better put into plain speech than lying diffused and darkening, like poisonous mists, in his heart. A thought, be it good or bad, can be dealt with when it is made articulate." -Alexander Maclaren (English minister of 1800s)

When our lives are dark, God *wants* us to be honest with him through prayer.

- (He also wants us to be **honest** and **lament** with **one another**. We're called to **bear one another's burdens** and **weep with those who are weeping**. After all, Asaph didn't just pray this to God, he wrote it down to share with others!)
- Listen, if you're going through something you cannot **drink** it away, **laugh** it away, **sleep** it away, **party** it away, **buy** it away, **sex** it away, or **ignore** it away...the path to peace is to **give it away** to God in prayer!

Days of trouble must be days of honest prayer. Let's keep reading...

²In 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.

(day *and* night – this seems to be never-ending for Asaph)

³When I remember God, I moan;
when I meditate, my spirit faints.

(He tries **remembering God** which you'd think would lift his spirits and bring him comfort, but actually the exact opposite happens – it only makes his situation worse.)

⁴You hold my eyelids open; (now God just seems like a bully)
I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

⁵I consider the days of old,
the years long ago. (You used to be good to me, God!)

⁶I said, “Let me remember my song in the night;
let me meditate in my heart.”
Then my spirit made a diligent search:

Remember, Asaph is a worship leader...he’s pretty good at knowing how to **stoke an emotional flame** that’s flickering and dying. So he says, “*Let me remember my song in the night.*” Usually he’s able to just sing his pain away...**but now it’s not working!**

- *Ever had this experience? As a believer, what do you do when what used to draw you close to God doesn’t work anymore?*
 - You used to spend time in your Bible and feel like God was talking directly to you! Now it just feels like part of a checklist of “things good Christians do.”
 - You used to be able to talk about the things of the Lord for hours on end...now he’s not quite as exciting as sports and politics and Instagram.
 - That worship song you used to love and would draw you so near to Christ has become just another swipe on the playlist.
- Some of you have been believers so long you’ve forgotten what it’s like to come to church and have a genuine encounter with the God of the universe! And no matter what you try to do, nothing changes.

That’s what Asaph is going through here... and it just keeps getting worse. He then moves from **wondering about his circumstances** to **questioning God’s character**. Look at how **brutally candid and honest** this prayer gets...it’s almost **uncomfortable**:

(vv7-9) “Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?”

Here’s the core of what he’s asking: *Has God **changed**? Has his character changed? Have his ways changed?*

Some of you hear that and it almost makes you **uneasy**...you might even think it’s **blasphemous** to talk so “**carelessly**” and “**frivolously**” to such a holy God. Maybe that’s how you grew up – never allowed to question God. You were told that the Christian life is “all reverence; no questions.”

- **A friend of mine** – him and his family have **gone through hell** the last few years – and he said, “I used to think that if I *really* told God how I was feeling that I would be seen as **weak in my faith**. I used to think that if I came to him with all of my **questions** and **anger** and **confusion** that he would sit in heaven **scoffing** and **disappointed** in me for not trusting him enough. But instead what I came to realize is that he *wants* me to come to him with those doubts, questions, and frustrations. That actually my **heartaches** and **confusions** and **questions**, when directed *toward* him, wasn’t a *lack* of faith – rather they were an act of **deep abiding faith** because I was laying my burdens before the only one who had the power to heal them. **In order to let God care for me I had to first cast my cares on him**...and that meant being honest with where I was in both my head and my heart.”
- Now his circumstances, much like Asaph’s, did not change, but his **perspective** did! They still are in the midst of their struggle, but their confidence in God is concrete.

You might be in a place where you’re asking those same questions: *Has God changed? Does he care? Do his promises apply to **me**? Here’s what I want to declare to you today: If **fear** and **depression** and **despair** and **sadness** and **grief** ask these types of questions, **pray to God honestly** about how you’re feeling and then move forward and let **faith** answer those questions from Scripture.*

Which brings me to the second way Psalm 77 calls us to have confidence during his silence, which is to...

2) Remember God through His Word (vv11-12)

For Asaph, something happened between **verses 7-10** when he was so **low and discouraged** and **verses 13-20** where he is full of **worship and confidence**. What happened in verses 11 and 12 when **worship swallowed up his doubt?** When **boldness swallowed up his fear?**

Look at it again:

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.

Asaph's strategy for fighting **discouragement** and **doubt** and **darkness** – which can be your strategy today! – is **remembering, pondering, and meditating** on the deeds, wonders, and work of God.

Which begs the question: *How are the works and deeds available to our minds today?...* By **the Word of God!** We **remember** and we **ponder** and we **meditate** one way – by the written Word of God.

- We **fellowship** with Christ through the written Word.
- We **pray and talk** to him on the basis of what we know from the written Word.
- We **hear him speak** to us through the written Word.
- He **shows us his character** and will through the written Word.
- We **find comfort in his promises** through the written Word.
- Which is why we say around here when life cuts us we want to **bleed** God's Word.

○ **Summit Church, we remember the goodness of God towards us in Christ Jesus through the Word of God!**

Which means there is a connection between the **amount of confidence** you have in God and the **amount of Scripture** that's in your heart – not your head, but your heart! When life, or the Enemy, or your emotions, or others attack you, **the Word is your best weapon.**

God may *seem* silent at times, but, friends, he is not. He has spoken through his Word...and “when Scripture speaks, God speaks!”¹

To be clear, Asaph finds relief but **his circumstances had not changed**. This isn't a “change your perspective and all your problems go away” faith. That's not how **life** works and that's not how **God** works.

- His **problems** are still there, but a change in **perspective** ends up leading him to great heights of **praise**.
- For all you English majors who were **paying attention to the pronouns** in this Psalm, you saw how in **the first half – when things are not going well** – that there are 18 occurrences of the first person singular pronoun (*I or me*), and only 6 references to God.
 - However, in verses 13-20 there are **21 mentions of God and zero personal references at all**. That's what's called a change in perspective, ladies and gentlemen.
- Here's what Asaph knew: **You don't always choose what crosses your mind, but you can choose what stays here.**
- This is Asaph **choosing to meditate** on the deeds of a **Sovereign loving God** rather than looking at his **situation through the lens of his feelings...**this is him **choosing to call to mind** God's deeds, wonders, and works of the past which then gives him **confidence** in God in the present.

Regardless of how you feel, God isn't, never has been, and never will be silent in your pain...because where Scripture speaks, God speaks. What this means is that when what you see doesn't match up with what God has said in his Word, **always go with what he said:**

- You may **feel** like *God is going to spurn you forever*, yet he said in **Ps. 94:14**, “**For the LORD will not forsake his people; he will not abandon his heritage;**”
 - **GO WITH WHAT HE SAID.**
- You may **feel** like God will *never again be favorable* to you, yet he said in **Ps. 84:11**, “**For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the**

¹ Luther

LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.”

- GO WITH WHAT HE SAID.
- You may feel like God’s *steadfast love* has forever ceased, yet he said in **Ps. 103:17**, “the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him,”
 - GO WITH WHAT HE SAID.
- You may feel like *his promises* are at an end for all time, yet he said in **Gal. 3:29**, “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”
 - GO WITH WHAT HE SAID.
- You may feel like *God forgotten to be gracious*, yet he said in **Exodus 34:6**, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,”
 - GO WITH WHAT HE SAID.
- You may feel like God has *shut up his compassion* toward you, yet he said in **Lam. 3:22-23**, “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end, they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”
 - GO WITH WHAT HE SAID.

When what you see doesn’t match up with what God *said* in his Word, always **go with what he said**.

Every second of every day, your union and relationship with Christ – the way you experience and walk with Jesus – will be **shaped**, **sustained**, and **carried** by the Word of God.

- If you are not in the Word then you will be **weak**, **fragile**, **easily swayed**, and **easily deceived**.
- A Christian w/o a Bible is going to be one w/o much of a backbone. **Old SBC Preacher**: *A Bible that’s falling apart...*

The **word of God** is what enables the **people of God** to live their lives to the **glory of God** because they become immovably confident in the **character of God**.

- The single most effective means of bolstering our confidence in God and his character is by spending time in the Word, because **you can only trust God inasmuch as you know him...**and how much you know him is directly tied to how well you know his Word.

One of my favorite books is called “Spiritual Depression” by DMLJ: **“Whatever your circumstances at this moment, bring all you know to be true of your relationship to God to bear upon it. I do not suggest that you will be able to understand everything that is happening. You may not have a full explanation of it; but you will know for certain that God is not unconcerned. That is impossible. The one who has done the greatest thing of all for you, must be concerned about you in everything, and though the clouds are thick and you cannot see his face, you know he is there. Now hold on to that. You say that you do not see his smile. I agree that these earthborn clouds prevent my seeing him, but he is there. Say to yourself, ‘I believe this, I am resting on this, I am certain of this and though I do not understand what is happening to me I am holding on to this!’”**²

So Asaph begins **remembering** and **listing out** some of the greatest acts of **grace** and **power** that have characterized God’s dealings with his people:

- God brought Israel out of Egypt (v15)
- He divided the Red Sea before them (vv16; 19)
- He destroyed the Egyptians (vv17-18)
- He took his people Israel under his own guidance and protection (v20)

Tucked away in the middle of all of this is kind of a strange verse... look at v19, “Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen.”

Here’s what he’s saying:

- *God, we had no idea what you were doing at the time because we couldn’t see you – your footprints were unseen. You were*

² DMLJ, *Spiritual Depression*, 145.

silent. You were ninja-like. **Yet you were there.** Therefore, even in your silence I'm going to remember that it does not mean you are absent. I'm going to be confident because I remember who you are...I remember what you've done...I remember how you rescued your people...**God, even when I can't trace you or track you, I can still trust you.**

- Here's a secret to living with joy in the Christian life: when you know the **who** you don't have to know the **how**.
- When you are being carried by the Word of God you can praise God for the **who**, regardless of the **what**.
- I don't have to know the **how** if I know **who**!

You might say, "I hear that, but if you knew **my situation** you'd understand why it's impossible for me to come in here and worship God!" You're thinking that Asaph started to *really* believe in the second half of this psalm because God probably came through for him and things got better, right? **That's. Not. It.** Asaph is **still sitting in darkness**, just like you! So what's changed? Asaph has!

- I told you back in verses 3 and 6 he *tried* to remember God, but it didn't work? Now he's trying AGAIN...FOR A THIRD TIME...because, yeah sometimes you need a change in perspective, but other times it's **persistence that leads us to the greatest heights of praise.**

Pastor Charlie Dates says at some point you'll come to see that worship is not only **personal** and **intimate**, but it's **something you gotta remind yourself to do**. There are times when you come to church and you need to be **pushed** and **prodded** and **encouraged**. But there are other times where nobody should have to push and prod and encourage you...but **you gotta learn to talk to your own self and remind yourself** of how good God is as evidence in his Word.

- You gotta **remember** that you didn't wake yourself up this morning, but that God gave you life today and that his mercies are new this morning.
- You gotta **remember** that you didn't stay up all night and watch over yourself when you went to bed, but God watched you, kept you, and sustained you.

- You gotta **remember** that you did not put money in your bank account, and give your bones strength to move and your mind the strength to work.
- Rather than, "How could I praise God right now?" the question should be, "How have I made it from last Sunday to this Sunday?" and then you **remember** all of the ways he has been good to you and you tell yourself before you get to church, "I'ma act a fool in church because God has been so good to me!" and that's what enables you, even in tough times, to **bless the Lord, OH MY SOUL!**
 - If you were to sit down at the end of each day and **write out**, and **remember**, and **ponder**, and **meditate** on all the ways God had been good to you, oh how your perspective would change! You would go from, "Where is God?" to "Where is another piece of paper because I'm running out of room!"

(VAMP)

Brothers and sisters, our faith is not based on what we **see** or **want** or **feel**; our faith is based on the **goodness, character, and nature** of God. We live by faith.

- Our faith is not based on things getting better—because, you know what, **they just might not**. You might **battle that illness** for the rest of your life. Your **wife may never come back**. You may **stay single** even though *all you want* is to be married.

But here's the thing: **our circumstances are temporary; God isn't**. And as difficult as life is for you right now, the Apostle Paul says that is just a "**light and momentary affliction**" compared to the **goodness and joy** that God has stored up for you.

- **Whether you taste that joy completely in this life is up to God; whether you taste it for eternity is up to you.**

Whatever you're going through today, **God may seem silent, but, dearly beloved, he is not absent**. And he proved that love to you once and for all at the cross of Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

In 1860 there was a **poet** and **songwriter** named Anna Warner. Anna's sister, Susan, was taking care of a young child that was dying...so Susan sent her sister a letter asking **if she would write a poem to comfort the dying child**. To this dying child, Anna began to pen the most comforting words she could think of:

*Jesus loves me—this I know,
For the Bible tells me so;*

In that **terribly painful moment** Anna believed what would bring the **most comfort** would be for someone to **remember** the simple message that **Jesus loves you**. And you can know that because **the Bible tells you so**.

“Jesus. Loves. Me.” That's is the **most central declaration** of the Christian faith and the **very cornerstone** of the nature of God. Think about Psalm 77 through the lens of the cross:

- At the cross we remember that Jesus's soul refused to be comforted as he moaned in anguish on our behalf...because he loves you.
- At the cross we remember how Jesus could barely speak because his lungs were filling with blood and water...which he willingly endured because of his love for you.
- At the cross we remember how God really did turn his face away so that Jesus could die and our sins be paid for...because he loves you.
- At the cross we remember that Jesus really did experience the **temporary silence of God** so that you and I could experience **the eternal love of God**.

*Jesus loves me – how do I know?
Because while I was still a sinner, Christ died for my soul.*

Therefore,

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?

“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end, they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

LORD'S SUPPER

