

# Meditating Through Grief: Psalm 77

Psalm 77 contains many “thought” words such as “remember,” “selah,” “meditate,” “ponder,” and “muse.” Asaph was certainly a thinker, perhaps a little too much for his own good in that his thinking often drove him to fear (see Psalm 73). Yet, he sanctified his much thinking and struggled within himself and the sanctuary until he gained the victory and ascended unto a right view of God. He combined pondering and the presence of God; thus, he learned to “perceive” something of God’s will (Psalm 73:16-17). Therefore, he shows it to be a very necessary thing that we commit our thought-life to the chambers of secret communion. In this 77<sup>th</sup> Psalm, he shows a pattern that we may emulate in this regard. In verses 1-3, he states the fact of his grief. In verses 4-9, he asks a series of questions that he must answer and contemplate. In verses 10-15, he makes a deliberate attempt to consider the nature of God. In verses 16-20, he expands on God’s kindness by tracing His dealings through the past. He interposes the word “Selah” between each section to indicate a place for paused thought and perhaps reflection on what had gone before. He has no definite conclusion, but we assume he wrestled himself out of grief since he ends by rejoicing in the Shepherd Who led His flock and could therefore lead Asaph.

His first section (v. 1-3) states in words what many believers are ashamed to verbalize. He begins with a recollection of prayer that accomplished no immediate comfort: *“My voice rises to God, and I will cry aloud; my voice rises to God, and He will hear me. In the day of trouble I sought the Lord; in the night my hand was stretched out without weariness; my soul refused to be comforted.”* This worshiper of the true God even dared to say, *“When I remember God, then I am disturbed; when I sigh, then my spirit grows faint.”* Disturbed at the thought of God! Discouraged at the results of prayer! The greatest things became his torture. These are the realities to which the strongest Christians sink. The weak simply cast off God and think of Him no longer. The strong believer admits he cannot reconcile his present

circumstances with his view of God, and so he proceeds in determination to address the issue until it is solved. True believers can be disturbed at the thought of God, but only temporarily until they beat their minds into the submission of faith. Indeed, their grief will be a channel to finding God But they must state their grief in clear terms lest they ignore it and never deal with the issue and leave permanent damage in their souls. Meditation starts by admitting circumstances as they really are.

After identifying his distress, Asaph actually enters into it deeper. He does what few are willing to do and sits silently in the terror of his own thoughts in order that he may discover their solution. He cannot speak unto God in lofty prayers; he only admits, *"You have held my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak."* He cannot praise God but rather asks nearly demonic questions: *"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?"* And it all culminates in a freakishly heretical statement: *"It is my grief, that the right hand of the Most High has changed."* What is happening? This deserves some comment.

Psalms like these do not justify accusations to a holy God, nor do they commend false views of Him in times of grief. This we must never do. Rather they *assume we will have these thoughts*, and it is better to verbalize them in so many words than to ignore them and be destroyed by them. If we do not state reality, we can never have a real solution because we will be addressing an unreal problem. Thus, the real problem will continue unsolved and destroy us while we are not watching. Thoughts spawned by grief must be spoken. To keep quiet does not make the thoughts disappear. It only means they will fester and come out in actions rather than words. There is no telling the danger of this. Meditation is built upon identifying and verbalizing thoughts as they truly stand.

So then, thoughts of God caused Asaph disturbance. He felt paralyzed in prayer. He genuinely wondered about the fundamental character of God. Was this his end? Was this the evidence of apostasy? It may have been if what

comes next did not follow. What did he do? He wrestled himself in the mind until he gained a proper view of things, what the ways of God taught regarding His character. He meditated. He mused. He remembered. He forced himself to stand on what he knew though it had been suppressed for so long.

*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.*

The reason we fail to heal is because we fail to think. We pray continually and talk much to God, but we forget that God wishes to speak to us. And so, we prolong our grief because we pity ourselves in our struggle to pray and so sink into bitterness and despair, yet we have forgotten to meditate and to face the issues head on. God wishes us to deal with our hearts before Him and His Word. Will it be painful? Pain is probably an understatement in this case: the process of arguing with ourselves and meditating on the Word and struggling in prayer before God will be excruciating in that it will crush every ounce of human pride. But it is the only way to true relief. It will not be the process of a day, but rather daily and weekly meditation to strive for a right view of God and His dealings. If we are willing to ask the negative questions like “Has God forgotten to be gracious,” we must also be willing to ask the positive questions like “What god is great like our God?” Meditation equips the believer to face the future by giving him a correct and deliberate understanding of God in light of His unchanging character. Without the contemplation of God, there is no anchor. Indeed, prayer is necessary. Regular reading is also necessary. But we must have that deep thought in the Word that subdues the whole being under the reign of right thinking and faith.

Finally, Asaph expands by reflecting on nature’s response to God. “*The waters saw you, O God; the waters saw You, they were in anguish; the deeps*

*also trembled.*" What stood as a symbol of his despair was itself subjected to the fear and sovereignty of God. He felt overwhelmed by oceans of grief, yet his meditation on God demanded that he saw them running in fear compared to the solace he could find in his God. He continues, *"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."* The trembling of the earth was not a sign of its disorder and chaos but rather its subjection to the mighty hand of God; thus Asaph's threats and fears also had to be subjected to divine authority. Even more, *"Your way was in the sea and Your paths in the mighty waters, and Your footprints may not be known."* Ah, the sea is ever unpredictable and strong to crush its foes, yet God's very pathway was through the sea. God was not swayed by its currents nor overturned by its waves; so chaos in circumstances cannot stand against His almighty purpose.

Through meditation, Asaph realized that just as he was once disillusioned by Almighty God, such was his lot as the creature. All of creation must bow to the mystery of His ways. So, Asaph healed by embracing, not a self-motivated or self-created view of God, but a view of God that let Him be Who He is and bowed at His will. Indeed, God's footprints cannot be known, yet our consolation is not in understanding God fully. Our consolation is in the last verse, *"You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron."* Here we have a picture of our Lord Jesus, our great Apostle Who leads the way into heavenly blessing and our Great High Priest Who intercedes, blesses, and stands for us in the sanctuary. This is our consolation, not in understanding God's footprints, but following after *Him*.

So, Asaph is not left with a formal answer for his struggle, but by meditation he found his sufficiency in God. The answer to his trial was not what he needed. He needed to pursue God through the struggle. This is what meditation accomplishes. It turns truth for the mind into appreciation for the heart. It turns reality into our greatest joy, not our enemy, for we have found reality to subject itself to the God Who is good. But we will not discover this goodness if we are not willing to consider it. Meditation works. It accomplishes real goals. It is different from prayer and Bible study, and it is

ever necessary. Theological analytics does not heal wounds and equip hearts, but the voice of God does. It is that we seek to hear through deep, quiet, and deliberate thought. Contemplate God, dear believer; He Himself is your resource.