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## God Has Not Forgotten You

*By David Wilkerson*

March 21, 2005 Have you ever known depression? Have you been so worried and perplexed that you endured sleepless nights? Have you had times when you were so low and troubled, no one could comfort you? Have you been so down that you felt like giving up, feeling your life was a total failure?

I'm not talking about a physical condition. I'm not referring to people who have a chemical imbalance or mental illness. I'm talking about Christians who, from time to time, battle a depression that hits them from out of nowhere. Their condition often comes not from just a single source, but from many. At times they're hit from all sides, until they're so overwhelmed they can't see beyond their despair.

If this describes you, then Psalm 77 was written for you. It is meant to point the way out of your distress and fear. This Psalm was written by a man named Asaph, a Levite, from the priestly line in Israel. Asaph was also a singer, and served as David's appointed choir director. Altogether, Asaph wrote eleven Psalms. And they were so filled with righteous instruction for God's people I would call this man a lay preacher.

Asaph wrote Psalm 77 after he fell into a horrible pit of despair. His condition grew so bad that Asaph was beyond comfort: "My soul refused to be comforted" (Psalm 77:2). This godly man was in such despair, nothing anyone said could bring him out of his condition. And Asaph himself couldn't manage to say even a word: "I am so troubled that I cannot speak" (77:4).

Yet Asaph was a praying man. We see this in the same Psalm, as he testifies, "I cried unto God with my voice...and he gave ear unto me" (77:1).

I'm sure Asaph had heard David's very similar testimony, in Psalm 34: "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry" (34:15). David says earlier in this Psalm, "I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.... This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (34:4, 6).

No doubt, Asaph had heard David tell the compelling story of how he had to flee to Gath to get away from Saul. David had to pretend he was a madman in that town to escape with his life. This exiled servant of the Lord felt so low at that point, like such a great failure, that he cried out to God. He sought the Lord in his agony, and David testifies that he was totally delivered. In fact, God put a song in David's heart.

We see David relating a new song of faith to his musicians, in Psalm 40. Surely this song made its way into the hands of Asaph, the choir director. The Psalm declares, "He...heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings" (40:1-2).

As the nation's worship leader, Asaph sang these songs about deliverance and answered prayers. He ministered these very truths to Israel, arranging and declaring them in song, leading the choir in a unified voice of faith. In fact, in his own worship song — Psalm 78 — Asaph chastises Israel for their unbelief. He corrects them, telling them God hadn't answered their prayers because of their sin:

"Their spirit was not steadfast with God. They spoke against God, saying, 'Can the Lord furnish a table in the wilderness? Can he give bread also?' For all this, they sinned still, and believed not for his wondrous works. They limited the Holy One of Israel. They provoked and grieved him" (see Psalm

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78).

Yet now Asaph was facing his own battle. The Bible doesn't tell us what caused this man's depression. All we know is, his soul was so heavy he couldn't sleep at all: "Thou holdest mine eyes waking" (77:4).

At this point, Asaph writes that he was disappointed by God's silence: "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord... Will the Lord cast off for ever? And will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" (77:2, 7-9). Israel's choir director seemed to conclude, "God doesn't answer my prayers!"

Is this the story of just one godly, despairing man in the Old Testament, or is it a story common to many praying believers today? Could Asaph's story possibly describe your own spiritual battle? Here was a godly, praying, faithful man. Asaph wasn't some sensual evildoer. He loved God's Word and taught it to the congregation. But now he was facing a terrible depression.

According to a recent newspaper survey, Asaph's attitude in Psalm 77 actually reflects the beliefs of most Americans. The poll states that the majority of people think God hears prayers, yet few of those people believe God answers their prayers.

The truth is, Asaph's experience isn't unusual for believers. Indeed, it depicts a fiery trial that, according to the apostle Peter, is common to every Christian: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Peter 4:12). Peter is telling us today, in effect, "Your trial isn't anything new. It has been experienced by God's people for centuries."

I've found that these deep, dark trials were experienced by the great preachers of the past 200 years. For example, Charles Haddon Spurgeon was known as one of the godliest Bible preachers of all time. Spurgeon was a praying man who sought the Lord continually. Yet he also faced deep, awful depressions. (In those days, the condition was known as "melancholy.")

John Fletcher is another such servant of God who suffered great depressions. He ministered under none other than John Wesley, who called Fletcher the most godly man on the face of the earth. The presence of Christ was so powerful in Fletcher's life that often his friends fell silent when he walked into the room. This man exuded the Spirit of Christ.

Yet Fletcher also experienced the awful depths that Asaph described. A horrible melancholy came upon him out of nowhere, afflicting him for days on end. Fletcher endured terrible trials of despair, with no rational explanation for them.

Andrew Bonar, a godly, praying pastor of the nineteenth century, described having similar experiences. He wrote this agonizing entry in his journal:

"I am falling behind in the heavenly race... God is not using me in the conversion of souls as he once did... I need to be free from the shadow of fear, uncertainty... Some of my nearest friends no longer seem to sympathize with my needs... Shame and sorrow fill me because of my unholiness.

"O what I have lost! My heart sinks in me. I am rebuked by the holiness I see in others... There seems to be a cloud between me and the Son of Righteousness. I think I heard the Lord say, 'I have not much

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need of you now...”

It seems that each of the holiest, most devoted and prayerful ministers has faced such an hour. They all describe being overwhelmed by despondency and discouragement. And few of them could explain where their dark cloud came from. It rarely seemed to stem from a single cause, but rather was the result of one trouble piling upon another.

Not even the godly, devoted apostle Paul was immune to such depressions. He wrote to the Corinthians, “Trouble...came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life” (2 Corinthians 1:8).

The Greek word that Paul uses for despair in this verse translates as, “We could not understand it; we despaired, even to death.” He’s saying, in short, “We longed to die, because we couldn’t comprehend what we were going through. We were pressed beyond our endurance.”

It’s hard to imagine these words coming from Paul. Who trusted God more than this fearless apostle? Who fasted and prayed more than Paul? Who had as many prayers answered? Yet there came upon Paul an hour of despondency such as he had never experienced. What was this condition?

Some Bible commentators believe it was a combination of trials. Among these was a deep mental anguish, caused by people whom Paul loved later turning against him. These close friends not only abandoned Paul but spread lies about him. They defamed his name. In addition, Paul was brought low by violent illnesses. He experienced shipwreck on more than one occasion. And evil plots were hatched against him, aimed at taking his life. On top of these things, Paul had anxiety over the care of many churches.

This would all seem too heavy for one man to bear. Yet even put together, all these things still don’t explain the deep despair Paul felt. He wrote, “I fell into such agony, I didn’t think I would survive. I thought it was going to kill me.”

Of course, Paul was delivered. He came out victoriously. But he never forgot that awful hour of despair.

Many godly people — devoted, holy, praying servants of Jesus — know what Asaph’s cry is all about. Their condition isn’t a way of life. No, they’re simply lovers of God who have been overwhelmed because Satan has come in like a flood. Like Paul, they’re being pressed beyond their endurance.

Christ is our example in all things pertaining to life, and this low condition is no exception. Christ is touched with the feelings of our infirmities. And even he faced such a deeply trying hour. He told Andrew and Philip, “Now is my soul troubled” (John 12:27). When Jesus said this, he was facing the Cross, knowing the time of his death was near. The Greek word for troubled here means agitated or disturbed.

Jesus was facing the most intense trial of his life. In fact, it was so deep and dark, he would later cry out, “God, why have you forsaken me?” He even told those who would crucify him, “This is your hour, and the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53).

What a statement for Jesus to make. Yet, Christ was saying, in essence, “This is Satan’s hour.” The period just before his death was the enemy’s moment to harass him. The devil amassed all his power

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to trouble the heart of a praying, holy man.

Likewise, you can be sure your dark, troubling hour is Satan's doing. The Lord doesn't put such awful depression on his people. How do we know this? Like Asaph, we pray, we worship, we seek to do God's will, we desire total freedom from sin's power. And that is exactly the kind of life that Satan comes to spoil.

At the same time, we can be sure that God has allowed this hour to come for a very good reason. Jesus told his disciples, "What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour" (John 12:27). He was telling them, "I can't fully explain this to you. All I can say is, God has allowed this moment, this hour of darkness."

Have you ever thought, "What can I say? I have no words to explain what I'm going through. I'm troubled, I'm disturbed, but I can't say why. Don't ask me to explain it, because I'm unable to."

What could God's purpose be in such an awful hour? Paul shows us God's specific purpose in our deeply trying, dark times: "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

"For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation" (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

Do you see God's purpose here? In the midst of our afflictions, the Spirit comforts us. And in turn, we're able to bring comfort to others who suffer deep afflictions. This is the Spirit's work: to bring comfort to his people through voices that have been tested. Therefore, we can know that as our own suffering grows worse, the comfort of the Lord becomes even mightier within us.

There are two dear brothers on our ministry's mailing list named Israel and Jesse Martin. Israel is 100 years old and Jesse is 102. One quit working at 92, the other at 97. They each love the Lord and have been receiving my messages for years.

These men are not only natural brothers but truly are "brothers in the Lord." Both testify that out of a lifetime of great trials, the joy and sweetness of the Spirit have deepened in them. They've witnessed terrible disasters for an entire century — the Great Depression, two World Wars, terrible droughts. And they've suffered personally throughout their long lives. Yet, at 100 years of age, these men are able to smile and proclaim more confidently than ever, "Through it all, God has not once failed." Their testimony after having "seen it all" is a Holy Ghost comfort to the rest of us.

What so troubled Asaph that he couldn't sleep? Asaph's testimony was, "I cry to the Lord, I pray into the night, and I know he hears me. But I don't see answers to my prayers."

Remember, this leader of Israel's choir had testified of God's character in Psalm 50:15, "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." Clearly, Asaph had known deliverances through prayer. He had experienced answers to his intercessions. He was a faithful minister, reminding others to trust God and not to grieve him by unbelief.

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But now, as a spirit of despair came upon Asaph, he couldn't shake it off. He writes, "I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed" (Psalm 77:3).

Asaph then recalled his past trials, other hard times when he had been brought through. He says he "considered the days of old... I call to remembrance my song in the night" (77:5, 6). This faithful servant tried to remember how God had answered his prayers, and how afterward he'd sung joyfully about the victories of faith.

But now he was facing the biggest trial of his life, and he was overwhelmed physically, mentally and spiritually. He states, "I complained, because it was all too much for me to endure."

What was Asaph's complaint? He says, "Will the Lord cast off for ever? And will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" (77:7-9).

Asaph was plagued by these questions, writing, "This is my infirmity" (77:10). He was declaring, in effect, "Here is what grieves me: God has changed. There has been a variation in the Lord I thought I knew. He has changed his attitude toward me for some reason. I remember all of his prior deliverances in my life. But there is none for me now.

"God simply doesn't favor me anymore. I feel he has cast me aside. I'm confused, troubled, overwhelmed, and I get the sense God is far away from me in this trial. I know he hears my prayers, but he doesn't answer them. As far as I can tell, God has forgotten me. Evidently, he's no longer in the business of delivering his people."

Beloved, you may not be depressed. You may not feel as devastated as Asaph was in his trial. You don't doubt that God answers your prayers, and you know the Lord isn't mad at you. But still, there is a disappointment deep inside. You're frustrated, because things in your life aren't working out as you'd hoped or planned.

This frustration may come in any number of areas: finances, career, marriage, children, ministry. Yet, all around you, things seem to be working out well for others. Your brothers and sisters in Christ seem to be doing fine. But your life seems at a standstill, or perhaps getting worse. Now you've begun to wonder, "How will I ever come through this downward spiral? There seems to be no hope."

How are we to come out of these awful periods of depression and discouragement? David emerged from his downward spiral with a song. And so did Asaph. Indeed, multitudes of godly saints throughout history have emerged from their depression and discouragement in just this way.

Scripture shows that David, Asaph, Job and other Old Testament saints came out of their dark times by remembering God's faithfulness to past generations. David writes that whenever his heart was desolate, "I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands" (Psalm 143:5). Asaph did the same: "I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old" (77:11). Indeed, Asaph says that all of Israel "remembered that God was their rock" (78:35).

It's a wonderful blessing to remember all our past deliverances. Deuteronomy tells us, "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee... Beware that thou forget not" (Deuteronomy 8:2, 11).

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Yet remembering God's deliverances was more than just a blessing to the Old Testament saints. It was a necessary discipline. The Israelites devised all sorts of rituals and observances to recall the Lord's deliverances in their lives.

Likewise today, the church of Jesus Christ is called to remember God's past deliverances. Yet we've been given a way to remember that's much better than in Old Testament times. You see, since the days of David and Asaph, God has poured out his Holy Spirit. And the Spirit now abides in our human bodies.

The Holy Ghost not only comforts us in our dark times. He doesn't just bring to our remembrance God's past faithfulness. The Spirit also gives us an understanding of the purpose behind our fiery trials. And he does this so our faith won't fail.

We see the difference in Asaph's life. This devoted, godly man doesn't share any kind of understanding with us in Psalm 77. Simply put, we don't know what his dark hour accomplished in his life. All he could tell us was, "The way [of God] is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known" (Psalm 77:19). Asaph's conclusion was, "God's ways aren't known. I don't know why he allowed me to fall into such depression and discouragement. I only rejoice that he has made me free."

Paul's response in the New Testament is much different. He tells us, "God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10). Then he adds this important statement: "The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (2:11). He's saying, in short, "Without the Holy Spirit, the steps of God in our lives couldn't be known or understood."

You can't fully recover your joy, peace or rest until you have a clear understanding of why God has allowed your Job-like trial. We'll simply never know God's peace in our affliction until his purpose for it has become a settled truth in our souls. We have to understand that our dark hour, our painful testing, has been permitted by the Lord for his own glorious purpose. What is that purpose? Simply, we are going to be the focus of incredible Holy Ghost comfort.

We're going to come out of the fire cleansed and stronger. And we'll be given a ministry that's greater even than that of the world's most famous preachers. What will this ministry be? It's the ministry of proven comfort and victory for a hurting people. And the result of this ministry will be as Daniel described: "Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand" (Daniel 12:10).

What an incredible calling we have! We suffer great trials in order to become God's comforting hands to others.

Two years ago, my daughter Debbie and her husband Roger lost their twelve-year-old daughter, Tiffany, to brain cancer. I know the agony they went through, the nights of wondering, "What possible purpose could God have in this?"

Some time ago, Debbie was in a mall when she saw a woman sitting with tears streaming down her face. Debbie asked, "Can I help you at all?" The woman responded, "You could never understand what I'm going through." Finally, Debbie coaxed the woman to tell her about her pain. The woman explained, "I've lost a child to cancer."

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At that moment, the sweetness of heaven descended. Debbie put comforting arms around that woman. And as my daughter shared her own story, both women found a measure of God's healing love.

Dear saint, God has not forgotten you in your deep, dark trial. I leave you with this encouragement from the Psalmist: "Thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried. Thou broughtest us into the net; thou laidst affliction upon our loins. Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.... Verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me" (Psalm 66:10-12, 19-20).

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