

Reflection One, v. 1-7

“Please listen.” Have you ever made that plea? It might be to one of your children. Or, it even might be to a parent. Have you taken the liberty to say it to God?

We need you. The Psalmist tells God this. *You are our shepherd.* You direct us, but we are presently feeling directionless. *Show us your immense power. Come rescue us!*

You get the feeling the people who are praying are in a deep hole spiritually or some sort of calamity but the writer never really says that. He says from that brink, “Just turn us!”

It’s not so much said, “Turn our problems,” but turn *us*! It’s as if everything will be all right if we are right with God.

It takes God to move us back to Him, but our awareness that we need to be moved!

Do you remember a time when God was absolutely clear to you? It felt so good, so right to have faith. But then life happened and pressure of one sort or another came, and sin invaded your life, you got busy, and God just faded from clear view.

Does that happen to you? This Psalm says yes.

So what do we do to regain that vibrancy of faith? The Psalmist says call out to God. Only God can restore that closeness to Him. When we regain that closeness, we will be okay.

Most weeks I end the service by saying, “The Lord bless you and keep you and **make His face to shine upon you.**” That’s what makes us okay.

“Restore us, God,” the prayer continues. “But my neighbors, my culture, think that my faith is a joke.” But I know in God is the place of hope.

God is the only one who can truly make a difference. God only can turn me, and that’s why we are here and why we pray. It’s in God that our frailness is lifted up; it’s in God that our sin is overcome; it’s God who can save us, day by day. Let us sing a prayer to God and seek His face. (Sing “Give Us Clean Hands”)

Reflection Two, v. 8-16

God wants us to know that He keeps us safe through good and ill. In this passage the writer recalls the glory days when Israel was brought out of slavery and set in the land.

Do you know how a vine grows? Have you ever gotten a vine in your shrubs or trees? The Psalmist paints the picture of God’s people as a very productive grapevine being planted; taking root, producing, multiplying, growing up into trees, giving shade, as well as an abundance of fruit. It’s a metaphor for God’s blessing.

We experience such blessing as Christians. God reaches out, calls us to believe, establishes us in faith, and we are fruitful as the church. There have been times in recent years that faith in Christ was well-respected and a blessing to many.

But then all of a sudden there's been a great reversal. The writer doesn't say why for his time – we can speculate Israel sinned and lost her blessing. We do not understand why the church has declined now. The Psalmist doesn't state the reason, he simply asks God why.

Is God gone? Has God forgotten? Ultimately, the burden is on God.

Somehow the Psalmist knows God is the center of everything and carries by His love, our burdens. So he prays, and you should freely pray,

Come back, we beg you, powerful God. Look down from heaven and see our plight. Take care of this grapevine that you yourself have planted. We are the children you have raised for yourself.

When things go well, God has given it. And, in the same way, no one will bring the solution when things go wrong except God. One thing we must learn as Christians is that God is not out of control. When we think that we are blind. Both ups and downs are in God's far-sighted hands.

Great reversals make us yearn for God. A young woman recently said to me, I want to remember this loss because it helps me stay focused on what I need. Here, the writer deliberately calls on God to come back, look down, take care of us because we are His children. This is a legitimate prayer. When it is prayed, we will indeed receive our answer.

Reflection Three, v. 17-19

This Psalm points to Jesus. The writer somehow foretells it. There is some chosen Man who will deliver us on God's behalf. Jesus is the tangible expression of God's loyalty. Through Jesus we will be kept faithful. Without Him restoration is not possible.

God, you see, has far-sighted wisdom. God knows we will abandon Him again and again. But more predictable than that is that God will come to us and fulfill His promises.

God comes to us all the time to make His face shine down upon us. God desires to do it. That is our only hope. It is a sure hope through which we are saved.

This is the time we must cement these things in our hearts and minds. Let these ashes remind you that we are frail and sinful and mortal in ourselves. But God is not hindered by our frailty. God can do all things with a glance toward us.

God shines His face on us that we may be saved.