

Prayer to worship

Part 1

A number of years ago, I had a person in the church I worked at who was struggling with life. We spent time together and I prayed for her regularly. I prayed with her, although she never prayed. She had lost a son to cancer, her husband was dying and she just couldn't get words out. She at times was angry with God other times just lost for words.

One day as I was having a coffee with her she spoke of a vibrant prayer life in the past. A prayer life of intercession, petition, and worship. But now, she just couldn't.

I read to her from Psalm 77. It was among a number of Psalms I read with her. We spoke briefly of God's amazing love. She agreed but still couldn't utter a prayer.

It was frustrating. I'm a pastor I should be able to help people. I silently uttered a prayer of help Lord, I don't know what to do here. Jean needs something and I've got no idea. At the end of the coffee, I asked her to do something for me. "Will you read a Psalm a day, If you can't pray, read someone else's I said with an air of flippancy.

Not long after wards I saw her down the street. She said it worked, and thanked me for my spiritual wisdom. I had no idea what she was talking about. She said I read a Psalm a day and God opened up to her ways of prayer and worship she thought impossible.

I told her of my silent prayer, my feelings of inadequacy . She smiled and said no wonder it worked, you had the wisdom to hand it over to God.

I haven't thought of Jean for a while but this week as I read Psalm 77, the conversations came back to me. God's word, opened up a world of worship for her.

Psalms opens up a world of worship to us and in many ways most of them are prayers, communication with God. Let's see where Psalm 73 takes us.

**Psalm 77:1 (RSV)**

I  
I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, that he may hear me.

Here we have the assumption of a hearing God. That assumption is in itself an act of worship. Our assumption is that God hears and can enact an answer. An exercising of Faith, and exercising of faith in a God who hears and acts. An act of subconsciously giving credit for who He is – that's worship.

A cry to the Lord is an act of worship through assumption.

### **Psalm 77:2-3 (RSV)**

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> I think of God, and I moan; I meditate, and my spirit faints. [Selah]

Note here that the authors hand is stretched out. We usually raise our hands in celebratory worship, here we see a stretching out and reaching for God. Notice he does this stretching out to God even when it doesn't seem like it is working.

Here is a huge thing. We are told to worship. Here the author demonstrates a worship that isn't fun, that doesn't seem to create good feelings and even seems to have a negative effect.

Notice too the word **Selah**

Scholars debate this one.

The Ungers Bible dictionary says it is: **Probably a musical notation indicating a pause.**

- C Hassel Bullock states that: Traditionally associated with "Always and everlasting" it may be a liturgical term rather than theological one. .... selah marked the end of the strophe or stanza identifying the spot where the Levites responded "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good for His mercy endures for ever."

Others believe **it was the signal to prostrate them selves before the lord.**

Still others believe **it was a point to stop and think.**

What about us? Well we can use it for any or all of those purposes. Whenever I see it in the script I stop and think about what it is God wants me to take notice of. Anyway moving on.

### **Psalm 77:3-5 (NIV2011)**

<sup>3</sup> I remembered you, God, and I groaned; I meditated, and my spirit grew faint.

<sup>4</sup> You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak.

<sup>5</sup> I thought about the former days, the years of long ago;

Notice at the beginning of v3 I remembered you. What do we remember of God. IN V5 I remembered about the former days. He is remembering God's influence on his life.

OK, you do it. Remember you former days. Remember What God has done for you. Your conversion, your spiritual growth, the specific things God has done for you. Now, remember. Some of it is long ago. Maybe, just maybe our spiritual lives are in the past. Maybe. Just maybe our spiritual development is in the past. We have a strength and a weakness in our Baptist system. We have conversion, Baptism and church membership, as rites of spiritual passage. Then you can live to a hundred and not have to grow or go to another level.

Notice what the author does next.

**Psalm 77:6-9 (NIV2011)**

<sup>6</sup> I remembered my songs in the night. My heart meditated and my spirit asked:  
<sup>7</sup> “Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again?  
<sup>8</sup> Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time?  
<sup>9</sup> Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?”

He uses His memory of worship to direct His thoughts of God’s goodness.

See the questions:

<sup>7</sup> “Will the Lord reject forever?

Will he never show his favor again?

<sup>8</sup> Has his unfailing love vanished forever?

Has his promise failed for all time?

<sup>9</sup> Has God forgotten to be merciful?

Has he in anger withheld his compassion?”

Then comes the word *selah* again and we spend some time contemplating the situation.

Then look at what the text says:

**Psalm 77:10-12 (NIV2011)**

<sup>10</sup> Then I thought, “To this I will appeal: the years when the Most High stretched out his right hand.  
<sup>11</sup> I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.  
<sup>12</sup> I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds.”

What is it about? Responding to his knowledge of God.

I will appeal – Because I know God is merciful,

I will remember because God has done amazing things.

I will consider what God has done notice it says mighty deeds. Amazing feats of the miraculous.

**Aside:** My mum used to send me letters. Sometimes they were just to catch me up on news, sometimes they were to inform me of something and sometimes, well, she’s my mum. Sometimes it was to let me know her thoughts about something, in other words point out some error in my ways. Sometimes though I’d get a sermon from her, or at least a sermon idea. She would read something and think I would like the idea for a sermon illustration or some point. She’d write it down so I could refer back to it. I have gone through some of those letters and I can see mums wisdom to a point where we published a book of her wisdom and

some of her life story. It's fun, but it has wisdom. What we have in Psalms is a letter to God. What would you write to God? Think about that.

What is happening – He is worshipping. He goes from these questions to this:

**Psalm 77:13-15 (NIV2011)**

<sup>13</sup> Your ways, God, are holy. What god is as great as our God?

<sup>14</sup> You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples.

<sup>15</sup> With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.

That's more like the Psalms we know, Praise to God, worship to God, all the good stuff, but the journey to get there has been hard for the author. Sometimes, it's hard for us. Sometimes, it isn't an easy thing to worship. But look where honest, open and heart felt prayer can take us. Notice: **The situation doesn't change. The author is still in a tough place, He just recognises God is with him in that place.**

Now look at this next bit!!!!

**Psalm 77:16-19 (NIV2011)**

<sup>16</sup> The waters saw you, God, the waters saw you and writhed; the very depths were convulsed.

<sup>17</sup> The clouds poured down water, the heavens resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth.

<sup>18</sup> Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked.

<sup>19</sup> Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen.

He gets carried away with describing how amazing God is. He runs with the idea of worship, he imagines the reaction God has on nature and he recognises God's awesomeness.

Maybe, just maybe we need to do the same. Run with worship, get carried away with giving God credit, imagine God's impact on nature, the world our world, His people.

The author finishes with an amazing point.

**Psalm 77:20 (NIV2011)**

<sup>20</sup> You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

The previous verses looked at God's interaction with nature. This verse talks about God's interaction with His people. Notice it is about Guidance. Actually the term like a flock would indicate that God is guiding, AND caring and looking after, it really is a total wellbeing kind of statement.

So the author of this Psalm is recognising God's total package of care even though he is still in that tough spot.

So, what do you want to write to God? There is paper there, if you need a pencil just put your hand up. Write it down. And listen to this - (Dear Mr God)