

When God Feels Far Away

Psalm 10

Studies in the Psalms #10

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THE Bible is so honest. It does not make every character of note a super-saint, sinless and above the mess of the rest of us mortals. It tells us of their good deeds, which we can easily emulate. It tells us of their sins, which we are to steer clear of. But it also tells us of their deepest agonies, depression, loneliness, and sorrows. It's in these stories that we draw comfort because we identify with the same struggles. As Paul says in Romans 15, "whatever was written in former days was written for our learning, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

Here in Psalm 10 we have one of those encouraging Scriptures because in it we see David experiencing something we know: at times *God feels far away*. Have you ever felt that way? "Lord, I've prayed for this so many times, please answer." "Lord, there is so much injustice going on, where are you?" "Lord, are you even listening; are you even there?" The Holy Spirit wants us to draw encouragement today. Maybe you feel God is far from you today. Perhaps you will soon. Let's dive in.

A Real Question (v. 1)

“Where are you, God?” I want you to see first that this is *a real question*.

You see it in verse 1: **Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?** The most important thing I want you to take away today is that this is a question your God and Father allows you to ask but more importantly invites you to ask.

And what does that say about the God of the Bible? He’s not some omnipotent deity floating above earth ready to reach down and crush anyone whom he hears even dare question him. For example, think of Islam. What does “Islam” mean? It means submission. Submission to whom? To an absolutely sovereign god. And how do you submit? By repeating the same prayers over and over again five times a day. It reminds me of when I was a kid and went to an autograph signing of a certain player who shall remain nameless. As we were in line we were told to step forward, give your photo of the player to the player to sign, but that you were not allowed to ask any questions. He was the player; I was the puny fan. But the God of the Bible invites our painful prayers. He invites our doubts. He invites our questioning him.

This says something about God but it also says something about us, the questioner. This is a question of faith. Notice that while we like David are perplexed by God's seeming absence, we still go to him with our petitions. That's faith. "God, I know you seem absent to me right now, but where else can I go?" David even calls the Lord "you" here, "**Why do you stand far away...why do you hide yourself?**" That's David's personal faith in a personal God. David knew the Lord who revealed himself and his name to Moses and Israel; we know him as our Father because of Jesus Christ coming to earth to reveal God's immense love for the world. We know him because the Holy Spirit has opened our hearts to receive his love and to love in return.

One Reason for the Question (vv. 2-11)

But ask yourself why David asks this question? Psalm 10 gives us *one reason for the question*. I say *one* reason because Scripture elsewhere says there are other reasons. Sometimes we feel far from God or he feels far from us because of our sins. We see that in Psalm 38, for example. Our confessional document, the Canons of Dort, says that there are times we commit serious sin that offends God and grieves the Holy Spirit and therefore leads us to feel guilt, interrupt our faith, wound our conscience,

and seven “for a while lose the sense of God’s favor” (CD 5.5). Sometimes we feel far from God or he feels far from us because he allows us to undergo trials and temptations for a season. We see that in 1 Corinthians 10 and 2 Corinthians 12, for example. But here David feels that God is far from him because of what he sees in the world around him, which God is not responding to. I think we can relate to this, can’t we? The more our world becomes smaller through social media the more we are acutely aware of Christian persecution, of suffering due to drought and famine, of the exploitation of children and women due to arrogant and prideful men, of the constant struggle in our own nation due to racial injustice, and the list goes on. And like David, at times we can look up and throw our hands up and say, “God, aren’t you seeing this? Where are you? Do something!”

And so David feels God is gone because he looks around and sees so much injustice in the world. He laments the prideful attitude of exploiters in verses 2–6. **In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor** and so he prays, **let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised** (v. 2). He hears their claims: **For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul** and this leads them to practical atheism, **and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD. In the pride of his face the wicked**

does not seek him; all his thoughts are, “There is no God” (vv. 3-4). Isn't that the attitude we hear so often by people high and low? “I can have what I want, when I want it, how I want it!” In contrast to the idyllic Psalm 1 that said the righteous prosper like trees but the wicked are blown away like stubble, David sees the real world: **His ways prosper at all times; your judgments are on high, out of his sight; as for all his foes, he puffs at them. He says in his heart, “I shall not be moved; throughout all generations I shall not meet adversity”** (vv. 5-6).

And then in verses 7-11 David looks at his enemies' painful actions. Listen to their words: **His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue are mischief and iniquity** (v. 7). Look at their actions: **He sits in ambush in the villages**—note that because it means this is not a pagan out there but one who is in the camp of Israel—in **hiding places he murders the innocent. His eyes stealthily watch for the helpless; he lurks in ambush like a lion in his thicket; he lurks that he may seize the poor; he seizes the poor when he draws him into his net** (vv. 8-9). How would this apply in our day? This is the rich exploiting the needs of the poor through casinos and lotteries. This is the rich exploiting young girls who are in need of work through modeling only to

enslave them in the sexual slavery of pornography. Look at the result: **The helpless are crushed, sink down, and fall by his might. He says in his heart, “God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it”** (vv. 10–11)

Our Response to the Question (vv. 12–18)

I don't know about you, but there are times when I feel totally helpless. I try to read a little every day about what is going on in the world. I read these kinds of stories and often feel like God is absent and like God is powerless. How about you? Now, you may have taken a class at some point or have heard of what I am about to say, but there is a twofold response to such stressful realities in the world. There is fight or flight. We can stand against or we can run away. The easiest response is flight; running away from the problems we face personally or that exist nationally and internationally. I know I feel at times it's just better to turn off my computer and just bury my head in a book. For you, your flight response may be food, alcohol, or anything else that selfishly numbs reality.

But *our response to the question* of God's seeming absence in our world of injustice needs to be to stand and fight. We are to “be strong in the Lord

and in the strength of his might” (Eph. 6:10). We are to “put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). How do you and I do this? Paul tells us in Ephesians 6 that after we’ve put on all the metaphorical pieces of armor that we are to be praying at all times (Eph. 6:18). And we see that here with David.

Do you feel like God is absent? Do you feel like God is distant? Then ask him to be present and near! **Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand** (v. 12). Are you tired of seeing the poor, the weak, the naïve exploited? Then ask God to help them: **forget not the afflicted** (v. 12). Are you tired of seeing and hearing people feed their sinful desires because God doesn’t do anything against them? Then cry aloud: **Why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart, “You will not call to account”?** *But you do see!* (vv. 13–14a). He is not absent! He is not silent! He is not unconcerned! **To you the helpless commits himself; you have been the helper of the fatherless** (v. 14). Have you had it up to “here” with the powerful using their power against the powerless? Then ask God to intervene: **Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer** (v. 15). This is a metaphor for breaking his power. **Call his wickedness to account till you find none** (v. 15). **The LORD is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his land** (v. 16). Are you

tired of feeling so comfortless? Are you tired of seeing people feel so abandoned by God? Are you tired of people not knowing the Lord and his promises? Then share with them this prayer: **O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more** (vv. 17–18).

And what a promise that is. It came true for Jesus Christ. He saw the powerful exploit the powerless. He experienced the feeling of God's absence on the cross when he cried, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" He was overcome by the power of wicked men and was laid in a tomb. He was conquered. And the world rolled on like it always had before. That was until Sunday morning when a new world began. And that new world of God's righteous kingdom is now here. Now it comes in grace, inviting sinners like you and me to enter its gates and protection. One day, we are assured, it will come in power, when all the so-called powers of the world will be swept aside and replaced by the authority and majesty of the Triune God, to whom belongs all glory! Amen.