

That We May Rejoice and Be Glad

Psalm 90:13-14

Recent news articles are full of stories about widespread infections, economic recession and unemployment. Responses to these news items could be summed up with two words: despair and dissatisfaction. People are sad, and some people are really mad. When will they be glad again? People are tired of being petrified, and they want to be satisfied. How much longer will things be like this? We are struggling. Many of us are grappling with questions about which authorities to believe. Whom do we trust? How and when can we rejoice and be glad again? Psalm 90 gives us a model prayer to know how to wrestle through these miseries. This model prayer is from Moses, the man of God. His prayer teaches us how to cry out for God's mercies in the midst of our miseries. In these verses, we learn how to pray that we may rejoice and be glad.

Listen to the words of his prayer in verses 13-14:

Return, O LORD, how long? and let it repent thee [have compassion] concerning thy servants. O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

These verses give us to two moving prayer requests:

- 1. Cry out to the Lord to turn to us as a nation. v. 13**
- 2. Cry out for the satisfying mercies of the Lord for us all. v.14**

First, let's consider verse 13:

Return, O LORD, how long? and let it repent thee [have compassion] concerning thy servants.

In verse 13, Moses pressed the Lord to turn back or return. (The verb, "return" is in an imperative form.) Moses made this appeal using the

personal name of God. In verse 1, Moses appealed to God as [Adonai] (Lord, master, possessor, or owner). But here in verse 13, He pressed his concern using the personal name of God (sometimes translated as “Jehovah” in English translations). Moses asked the Lord to turn back, and for urgent emphasis, he added, “How long?” In other words, “How much longer will you let things go on like this?” The second line of poetry in verse 13ⁱ explains what Moses meant. “And let it repent Thee” is sometimes translated “and have compassion.” The second line contains a passiveⁱⁱ imperative. So the translators of the KJV chose “let it repent Thee.” We could express this by saying, “let your turning back turn You to have compassion on Your servants.” It’s important to remember the context of Moses’ prayer. The Lord had sentenced the older Israelites (above 20 years of age) to die in the wilderness in answer to their rash statements (See Numbers 14:1-4, 29). In all their wanderings, they knew that they were destined to die in a hastily dug graveyard in the wilderness. This must have been exasperating and filled them with frustration. And this is not the only time this frustration with emptiness appears in the Scriptures. The Preacher’s words about frustrating emptiness (“Vanity of vanities”) echo through the Book of Ecclesiastes.

The moving prayer request in verse 13 is this:

1. Cry out to the Lord to turn to us as a nation.

Cry out (imperative) using the personal name of God to intercede for His servants. There is a great need for our nation to turn back to God. Psalm 9:17 declares, “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.” This is not the time to take a casual approach. Through the Scriptures, we see God’s instructions to a [nation in distress](#) (as in Isaiah 22).ⁱⁱⁱ It is time for us to cry out to God with utmost urgency. This helps to get the word “us” right in this request; Moses

was praying that his nation would fall to its knees as servants of God, and that the Lord would turn to them.

We have to treat this matter of God’s righteous indignation carefully as we apply this prayer as New Testament believers. The Bible is clear that the Lord Jesus does not beat up on His bride, the church. He does chasten and correct her, washing her with the Word (Ephesians 5:26-27). But the Lord does not visit His wrath upon her.

Psalm 90 is the prayer of Moses, the intercessor, as he prayed for his rebellious nation. The great need for prayerful intercession is evident in calamities throughout the Scripture (see Amos 7:1-6). In Psalm 90:13-14, we are learning how to pray that we may rejoice and be glad.

■ Cry out to the One who sentenced men to destruction.

This is the second time that the word “return” has occurred in Psalm 90. The first time was in verse 3. There Moses admitted that the Lord had turned men to destruction, commanding them to return to the dust. This reflects the Lord’s command in Genesis 3:19. The Lord said, “Return [to the dust] you children of men.” But Moses prayer, in essence, is “Return to us oh Father of mercies.”^{iv} What Moses prayed here reflects what he wrote about the Lord in Deuteronomy 32:35-36:

*“To [the Lord] belongs vengeance, and recompense;
Their foot shall slide in due time:
For the day of their calamity is at hand,
And the things that shall come upon them make haste.
For the LORD shall judge His people,
And repent Himself for His servants,
When he sees that their power is gone,
And there is none shut up, or left.”*

In his sermon [“Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,”](#)^v Jonathan Edwards commented about this text: “The use of this awful subject may be for awakening unconverted persons in this congregation.” Like Psalm 90, this text reflects the destruction of sinners (under God’s righteous indignation) and the deliverance of His servants (by His mercy).

Think of what it would be like be in Jerusalem (in 586 B.C.) to see your capital city completely destroyed by an invading army. There was nothing left. The buildings were left in rubble; most of their neighbors and loved ones had been carried off as captives. This is one of the worst calamities that any one of us could imagine. But it was in this very situation that Jeremiah’s Lament counseled the people to pray, “Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD. Let us lift up our heart with *our* hands unto God in the heavens. (Lamentations 3:40-41).^{vi} He counseled them to turn to the Lord who had sentenced them to destruction, knowing that He would turn to hear the prayer of humble servants. In these verses, we are learning how to pray that we may rejoice and be glad.

■ Cry out to the Lord to turn men so that He may turn to them.

This is a prayer of hope in the midst of despair. This prayer for turning is similar to Asaph’s prayer in Psalm 80: 3, 7, and 19, “Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.” This would be a wonderful way for us to pray for our nation right now. In his painful lament, Jeremiah prayed, “Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old” (Lamentations 5:21).^{vii}

These appeals to God are asking that He would turn men so He may turn to them. This appeal operates on the principle/promise of James

4:8: “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.”

As we shall see below, this idea of turning (turning back, repenting) can be found throughout the Scriptures. Ezekiel 18:23 makes it abundantly clear that the Lord takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked: “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? says the Lord GOD: *and* not that he should return from his ways, and live?” (See also Ezekiel 33:10-11.)

When we are aware of the destructive power of God’s righteous indignation, there is no time for complaining or pining away. It is the time for prayerful appeals to God and truthful appeals to men. God gives us [the valley of trouble for a door of hope \(Hosea 2:15\)](#).^{viii} In these verses, we are learning how to pray that we may rejoice and be glad. We are learning how a nation may turn back to God so that He may turn back to them.

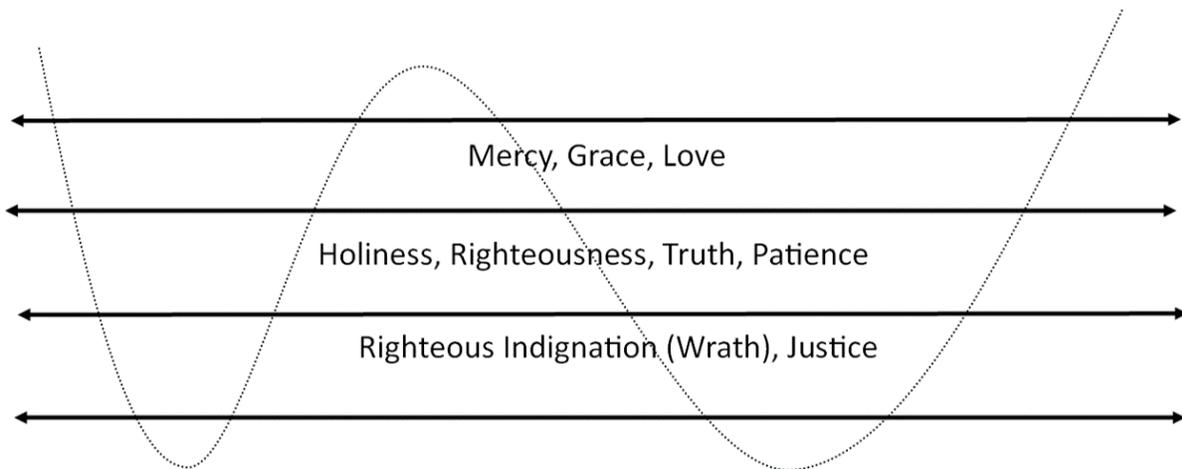
■ Cry out to the Lord for His compassion on His servants

Return, O LORD, how long? and let it repent thee [have compassion] concerning thy servants. v.13

Moses appealed to the Lord to turn to show compassion on His servants. By using the word “servants,” Moses was appealing for those who were submitting to God. This appeal for God’s compassion corresponds to Daniel’s prayer for his nation: “To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him;” (Daniel 9:9). In our own time of despair, we are seeing the need for Moses’ prayer. It’s time to cry out to the Lord to turn to our nation.

An Objection to Consider: Does God Turn?

It's important to understand verse 13 in the context of Scriptural teaching. For instance, doesn't James 1:17 seem to say the opposite of what Moses appealed for? "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." In God, the Father of lights, there is no variation, no change. And yet Moses appealed for God to turn back to His people. How do you reconcile these two ideas? About the Hebrew word [nacham] translated "let it repent Thee" (also translated "have compassion") Calvin makes the following observation: "The word נחם, *nacham*, which we have translated *be pacified*, signifies *to repent*, and may therefore not improperly be explained thus: Let it repent thee concerning thy servants. According to the not unfrequent



and well known phraseology of Scripture, God is said to repent, when putting away men's sorrow, and affording new ground of gladness, he appears as it were to be changed."^{ix} Note his words: "He *appears* as it were to be changed." How would the unchanging God of the universe reveal or demonstrate a change in His approach to people? After all, His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isaiah 55:9).

Here is one way to think about this problem. God is perfect in all His ways. His mercy, grace and love exist perfectly with His truth, patience

and righteous indignation against sin. He is unchanging (represented by the horizontal lines with arrow in the chart above). But mankind is constantly changing. All men sin, some men repent. The book of Judges records that pattern of Israel's rebellion and repentance (illustrated by the dotted line moving above and below the other lines). When they turned to cry out to the Lord, God dealt with them in mercy and grace. When men rebel, they face the righteous indignation of God. Those who would be prayerful intercessors see this pattern clearly. They can teach transgressors His ways (Psalm 51:13). And so Moses appealed for God to turn or change His response based on the repentance of submissive people. In this way, the unchanging God appears to change, but this is actually to reveal God's justice and mercy.

Rightly Using the Word of God

It is in times like these that we need a Savior and we need the Scriptures. Another passage of the Word of God is helpful in helping us know how to use verses 13 and 14. Consider the words of 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

The Scripture is breathed out by God. God breathed into man a living soul (Genesis 2:7, Acts 17:25). And by the Scripture's life-giving message of Christ, those who are dead in sin receive the breath of new life (1 Corinthians 15:45). How could we use the Scripture for all it is worth? Here's how: The Scripture gives us doctrinal teaching that is

good and right. It tells us what is true and right about God, about creation and about humanity. But with equal clarity, it gives us reproof – it tells us what is wrong. You can see this for yourself throughout the Scripture. Start reading your Bible and locate something that is true and right. Then, notice that just a few verses away you will find something that is wrong: man’s sin or the man’s frailty resulting from sin. But the Scriptures do not leave us without hope. They give us correction: how to take what is wrong and make it right. And they give us instruction in righteousness – how to keep it right (once it has been made right). The Scriptures will always be useful to help us see what is right, and to turn us from wrong to do what is right.

We can see this Biblical emphasis in Psalm 90.

- Moses began his prayer by exalting the truth about our glorious God. The Eternal God, our Creator, is the majestic dwelling place for His servants. This is God’s glory – His unique excellence. vs. 1-2
- Moses continued by grieving over what was wrong. He lamented over the rebellion of his people and the awful penalty for that rebellion. God’s righteous indignation (His wrath) has been visited upon the rebellious iniquity of mankind. vs. 3-11 This shows us what is wrong.
- Moses’ prayer makes a distinct turn beginning in verse 12. It turns from a description of the problem to correcting the problem. Moses’ most urgent concern was how to get wisdom in the midst of miseries. Knowing that our time here on earth is brief, it is urgent that we make the best use of our time.

This brings us to the second moving prayer request in verse 14

Oh satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

2. Cry out for the satisfying mercies of the Lord for us all. v.14

■ Oh, satisfy us

Let's face it: there isn't much in this life that really satisfies. Children believe that new toys will satisfy. Teens tend to think that what the world offers them will bring them contentment. But the games, sports, relationships, electronic devices, music and social media don't leave them satisfied. Young men and women are taught to believe fulfilling jobs and big salaries will bring them satisfaction. Yet they are dissatisfied. Businessmen fantasize that a little bit more money will bring them the contentment they seek, but they work hard and come up empty. Riches make wings and fly away (Proverbs 23:5). Warren Buffett's investing conglomerate, Berkshire Hathaway, lost \$50 billion dollars in the first quarter of this year; that's more than \$30,000 per share.^x

But Moses prayed, "Oh satisfy us . . ." How can men and women be truly satisfied?

■ Early

- Sooner rather than later

If you know that your soul is dissatisfied, why not seek the Lord sooner rather than later? "Now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). It is time to seek Him before it is eternally too late (Proverbs 1:22-33).

- Early in life

Charles Spurgeon preached a wonderful message entitled, ["The Young Man's Prayer" based on Psalm 90:14.](#)^{xi} This would be a great message to read aloud together as a family. In this message, he strongly appealed to young people to turn to the Lord early in life. Doing so, they will find complete satisfaction in the mercies of God.

■ With Thy mercy

The Hebrew word [chesed] (translated here as “mercy”) is one of the most powerful words in the Hebrew Old Testament. It is translated as “mercy,” “kindness,” “lovingkindness,” “goodness,” and “favor.” This was God’s [great blessing on Abraham](#), and God promised him that through his descendant, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. When Moses begged God to pardon the people of Israel in Numbers 14:19, he appealed on the basis of the greatness of God’s mercy. This is the mercy of God that has caused His people to shout with joy (Ezra 3:11). Across the years, prayerful people have appealed to God’s great mercy in times of distress (Nehemiah 1:5). This [chesed] is what we rejoice in, according to Psalm 23, “Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” It was this great mercy that David sought when he repented of his adulterous, murderous ways in Psalm 51:1. This characteristic of our God is what we praise when we repeat, “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not.” This is the magnificent mercy that satisfies the soul. And this is the [blessing that God gave us in Bethlehem](#).

In these days of fear and frustration, we need Psalm 90:14 now more than ever. Sinful people are under God’s wrath all their days, and away they fly. Moses prayed for submissive people who would find that God’s mercies satisfy.

God has set eternity in the heart of every man (Ecclesiastes 3:9-15). As wise King Solomon pondered the exasperating emptiness of daily life, he saw God’s mercy in little things. He spoke of frustrating daily work and daily meals taking on new meaning under God’s mercies. But people all over the world eat and go to work without satisfaction. How

can they be satisfied? How can they sing, rejoice and be glad ALL their days?

This complete satisfaction is only possible by the gift of a Redeemer from the Father of mercies to the children of men. By this gift, men who were under God's wrath meet the God who is rich in mercy, love and saving grace (Ephesians 2:4-7). And they are satisfied, completely satisfied, all their days and on into eternity.

This satisfaction for the soul is certain; it was prophesied in Isaiah 55:1-9. When you are frustrated with your work, your workplace and even your mealtime, this prophecy is for you. The prophet spoke of satisfaction by "the sure mercies of David." You see, in 2 Samuel 7, God had promised to send a king, the Son of David, to show His magnificent mercies. When the Apostle Paul explained the finished work of Jesus Christ (in Antioch Pisidia), he referred to "the sure mercies of David." Christ's dying for our sins, being buried and rising again from the dead show us "the sure mercies of David." This is the great satisfying mercy of God. God sent His Son to satisfy us with His mercy. Those who embrace His cross and His resurrection find genuine satisfaction.

How then can you be satisfied? In Luke 18:9-14, Jesus told the story of two men: a Pharisee and a tax collector. In his self-righteousness, the Pharisee prayed, thanking God that he was not like other men: unjust, involved in extortion, an adulterer, or even like the tax collector. But the tax collector called upon the sure mercies of David when he cried out, "O God be merciful to me a sinner!" Jesus said about the tax collector, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted." Every one who will be like that tax collector, crying out as a sinner in need of God's mercies, will

find that God justifies him, and satisfies him with His great mercies for all of his days.

The Result:

That we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

- That we may rejoice and be glad
- All our days

In Psalm 90:9, Moses had written, “For all our days are passed away in thy wrath . . .” But here, near the end of his prayer he prays that “all our days” would be full of joy and gladness.

In these verses, we learn how to pray that we may rejoice and be glad.

The Biblical Gospel of G.R.A.C.E.

The prayer of Moses in Psalm 90 helps us to remember what all of the other 1,188 chapters in the Bible are about. What is the Bible about? What is the Gospel about? It’s about the glory of the true and living God. But the Bible, and the Gospel within it, are a revelation to sinful mankind. They speak of mankind’s rebellion and the awful penalty for that rebellion. But the Bible does not leave us without hope. The central figure in the Scripture is the Christ, Jesus our Lord. Coming to earth and becoming a human being, He lived the righteous life that every man should have lived. Then, He died the rebel’s death that He did not deserve; He tasted death for every man as our Substitute. On the cross, He suffered the infinite righteous indignation that we deserved. He conquered death’s penalty and rose again to show us the power of the living and true God. Finally, the Bible appeals for every

one of us to exercise faith: to embrace Christ by faith today. We can summarize this Biblical emphasis with the acronym “G.R.A.C.E.”

G: The Glory of God

Romans 11:36 “For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen.” (Revelation 4:11)

R: The Rebellion of Man

Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:10; 10:3)

A: The Awful Penalty for Rebellion

Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the Gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Ezekiel 18:4)

C: Christ Paid the Penalty!

Romans 5:8-9 “But God commended His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.” (John 3:16)

E: Embrace Christ by Faith Today

Romans 10:9 “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Pastor Gordon Dickson, Calvary Baptist Church, Findlay, Ohio, May 3, 2020

ⁱ This is referred to as a “bicolon” in which the second phrase echoes or amplifies the first line.

ⁱⁱ Niphal

ⁱⁱⁱ An audio message on A Nation in Distress (Isaiah 22)

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=731191223523972>

^{iv} c.f. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 In Him, even the fatherless find mercy (Hosea 14:3)

^v Audio reading of [“Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” here](#)

^{vi} Carefully consider the context of these verses with references to God’s anger against rebellion. Verses 40-41 teach men how to call upon the Lord rather than complain about their punishment.

^{vii} It is likely that Jeremiah was reflecting on Psalm 90 when he wrote Lamentations 5:19-21

^{viii} A Door of Hope: manuscript and audio link at <https://www.cbfindlay.org/a-door-of-hope/>

^{ix} John Calvin and James Anderson, [*Commentary on the Book of Psalms*](#), vol. 3 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 474.

^x Sergei Klebnikov, Berkshire Hathaway Lost \$50 Billion Last Quarter As Warren Buffett’s Investments Took A Hit From Coronavirus, Forbes, May 2, 2020, accessed at

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/sergeiklebnikov/2020/05/02/berkshire-hathaway-lost-50-billion-last-quarter-as-warren-buffetts-investments-took-a-hit-from-coronavirus/#479683867fcf>

^{xi} Charles Haddon Spurgeon, The Young Man’s Prayer, Metropolitan Tabernacle, Vol. 9, 513, June 7, 1863 accessed at <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-young-mans-prayer#flipbook/>