



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

"All About Praise" LESSON 4

Let me say this right from the beginning: I LOVE Psalm 77! I cannot tell you how timely and relatable it is for me, as I'm sure it will be for you as well. These past few weeks have been about as overwhelming as they come. Besides plain old busyness, which can be physically demanding, it has been a very emotionally and spiritually stressful time. As soon as I read this Psalm, I felt an instant "kindred" spirit with the author, Asaph. He, too, was overwhelmed, as well as distraught and in despair. What a comfort to read his words and see what he does to bring comfort to his soul.

As you do your lesson this week, may you also be encouraged and uplifted by the words of the Holy Spirit through Asaph, the priest/worship leader. May the Lord bring you a spirit of joy to replace the spirit of heaviness you may be experiencing today. And if you're not overwhelmed this week, make sure you tuck away all the great nuggets of truth and hide them in your heart so at your time of despair, you can draw upon the words of Psalm 77.

First Day

1. Read Psalm 77:1-20. Observe the facts. Who wrote this? To whom? Why is he writing?

Psalm 77 is considered one of the "lament" Psalms. Most scholars believe it to be a personal lamentation rather than a national one, although it is not clear exactly what caused the author to write it. The nation of Israel could have been experiencing times of trials, but it appears that Asaph's grief is a result of some type of personal pain and suffering.

2. List any repeated words, thoughts, or phrases in the text.

3. How many times does Asaph refer to himself with a personal pronoun?
(List the verses as well.)

4. How many times does He refer to God? Also list the verses.

5. How would you describe the author's "style" of writing?

6. Do you see a definite break in thought somewhere? What verse?

7. What would you say is the main point, or theme, of this Psalm?
What would you say is the key verse?

8. Can you give it a title that reflects that main thought?

9. After reading Psalm 77 through, write your thoughts. How can you relate to it?
What emotion did it stir in you? What immediate application do you see for yourself?

We'll end here for today. Hopefully, the Lord has already shown you some insights that you can apply to yourself and the situations you face. I am so thankful that we can run to our God in times of trouble. We can always find our refuge in Him (Psalm 91:1-2).

Memory Verse of the Week: "I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember Your wonders of old." Psalm 77:11

Second Day

Work on your memory verse. Hide it in your heart.

1. Read Psalm 77:1-20. Reread verses 1-3. What seems to be Asaph's problem? (Does it specifically say?)

How many times have you felt completely alone, or abandoned by God? You pray, and keep praying, yet it feels like God isn't listening at all. Have you ever experienced so much grief that you expect God to move in and help ... but He doesn't? Have you ever laid awake at night and couldn't sleep because you were in so much pain? If so, you can certainly relate to Asaph.

2. Read Psalm 22:1 and Matthew 27:46. Who else cried out in despair, feeling abandoned and alone?

This section breaks my heart and encourages me at the same time. It's completely normal to ask God questions when we're hurting. It's comforting somehow to know that great men in the Bible had their times of questioning too. But the great thing about God is that He desires us to run straight to Him with our questions and fears. He doesn't want us to pretend or hide how we feel. He wants us to be honest and straightforward like Asaph. We have access to the Father through Jesus Christ and we can come boldly to His throne of grace in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16). Our first lesson from Asaph ... **talk to God.**

3. In your time of need, do you run to God? Are you being honest and straightforward, or are you afraid to let God know how you really feel? Do you feel close enough to Him to tell Him what's really on your heart, vocalizing the questions and fears that sometimes plague you?

Asaph's hands were "stretched out in the night," which is symbolic of pleading, or begging. Night is usually a time of rest and quiet, but sleep was escaping him.

4. Have you ever lain awake at night, unable to sleep because your soul was in despair, or you were experiencing severe physical pain? Asaph said his soul "refused to be comforted." What can you learn from this Psalm about what you should do during those nights?

Spurgeon wrote, "Sleep is a great comforter, but it forsakes the sorrowful, and then their sorrow deepens and eats into his soul."

Warren Wiersbe said, "Someone has suggested that when you can't sleep at night, instead of counting sheep, talk to the Shepherd." That's what Asaph did.

Sometimes going to the Lord can be painful. Verse 3 says, "I remembered God and was troubled." Asaph wasn't getting any answers from God for his problems, and it was causing him to be emotionally broken.

5. Why can we become "troubled" at times when we go to the Lord? What does that mean?

When he had trouble, Asaph went to the Lord. He didn't seek diversion or solace in busyness, drinking, or amusement. He didn't deny that he had issues. Asaph sought the Lord.

6. What types of things do we sometimes use as diversions to try to keep our

minds off of what is really troubling us?

7. Okay. Let's get personal. Have you been using something or someone as a "diversion" to avoid facing your issues? (Are you ready to go to the Lord instead?)

8. Read Psalm 77:4-6. We are often told to "remember" the past and what God has done, and it can encourage us. This time, though, that doesn't work for Asaph. Why not?

9. In verse 6, what step does Asaph make sure he does?

Asaph thought about what we call the "good old days," in hope of finding encouragement. He remembers when the Lord would give him a "song in the night." But Asaph wasn't finding that song, which seemed to depress him more because it appeared that God had forsaken him. Where had He gone? We'll get a better glimpse into his heart tomorrow when we read the next section. But it's one thing to endure trials and pain when we sense God's presence; it's crushing when we feel like we are alone.

10. For our last question, list all the "I will" statements so far in verses 1-9. What does this suggest to you?

Asaph is thinking a lot about himself at this point. But tomorrow, he's a new man! See you then!

Third Day

What's your memory verse?

1. Read Psalm 77:1-20. Focus on verses 7-9. Asaph talked to God in verse 1. In verse 6, he began to talk to himself. Now he finally gets to the heart of the matter, the questions he really has for God.
2. In verses 7-9, he asks 6 rhetorical questions. Can you list them?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.
 - 6.
3. Do you think Asaph knew the answer to each question? If he heard an audible "no" to each one, do you think it would have changed how he felt?
4. He first asks, "Will the Lord reject me forever? Will He stay away from me permanently? Have I sinned so much that I've completely blown it?" Have you ever asked yourself these questions? What's the answer, according to Hebrews 13:5?
5. "Will He ever show me favor again?" Can you think of a verse that answers this question?
6. "Is His mercy gone forever?" Has it run out? Have I used it all up? Is my life not yet broken enough? Has His character changed that He is no longer merciful? Read Psalm 100:5 and Lamentations 3:23 to answer this question.
7. "Have His promises failed?" Can He take them back? Can He change His mind?

Read 2 Corinthians 1:20 and James 1:17. Can God break His promises?

8. How would you answer someone that had these questions: "Does His 'unfailing' love vanish forever when I don't get an answer from Him? Will His love return? Is this what He calls 'Love'"?

I love what Wiersbe said. "We do not live on explanations, we live on promises." That's what it means to "live by faith" (2 Corinthians 5:7). Isaiah 55 tells us that "God's ways are not our ways," and we are usually happy about that. But when we face trials or become discouraged or distraught, we easily forget. Sometimes we throw out everything we know about God and His character, and look inward with self-pity or doubt. Sadly, it seems that we "American" Christians tend to believe God's promises only when things are going "our" way, or our prayers are answered quickly and the way we think is the best. That's not faith. Faith means trusting that God is God, even when it hurts. God is God even when we don't see Him, or understand what's happening. And God is God when we don't agree with His decisions or ways.

I love the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in Daniel Chapter 3. They refused to bow down to a gold image of Nebuchadnezzar that had been made in order to trap them. But their reply to the king convicts me beyond belief.

9. Read Daniel 3:1-25 to refresh your memory. After you read it through, go back and look at their response in verses 16-18. Wow. How does it relate to the discussion above about trusting in His promises?
10. Are you struggling with living on His promises, desiring an explanation for whatever is happening? Can you, like the three young men above, believe the promises of God, even when things look bleak?
11. End by writing a prayer, confessing anything you need to, and ask the Holy

Spirit to help you walk by faith, and not by sight.

Fourth Day

Mediate on your verse today.

Our Psalmist takes a turn for the better; He now turns his gaze upward. And his heart is changed, as a result.

1. Read Psalm 77:1-20. Reread verses 10-15. What word in verse 10 seems to change the direction of his focus?
2. What resolve does he now make in these verses?

In verse 11, he uses the word "remember" again. It's interesting that in the previous section, he remembered the past and how much favor God showed him, but it made him sad, wishing he felt that way again. But now, He will choose to remember God and all His works, and that makes all the difference.

God's "right hand" speaks of all His fullness and power. The "years" referred to in verse 10 simply is the past in which God has done great and glorious works, which are often ascribed to God's right hand. The title "Most High" is from "Elyon," which means "The Most High God, possessor of Heaven and earth." God's history of love towards His people was evident through all the miracles and works God had done. Asaph now was choosing to focus on God, instead of himself.

3. What wondrous things has God done in your life? Can you list a few? Mediate on those things, allowing them to remind you of the greatness of God.

In verses 13-15, Asaph answers all his rhetorical questions himself. (These verses are all about God, in the way that the first section was all about Asaph.) "God is too loving to be unkind, too good to do anything wrong, too wise to make any mistakes, too great to be petty, spiteful, small or mean; above all, too powerful to be thwarted. God is God. He is a God who rules, and because He rules, He does wonders in the world. He is also a God who redeems, and because He redeems, there is no reason to fear or doubt Him." (John Phillips)

When we're overwhelmed, we can immerse ourselves in God's "story." He has a great track record. His righteous right hand delivered us and His people in the past, and He won't abandon us now. We can remember His deeds; we can recount, retell, and relive the ways of the Lord.

4. What do you think he means by the phrase "God's way is 'in the sanctuary'"?

Many scholars believe Asaph is referring to the Temple, specifically the "Holy of Holies" which would symbolize God's holiness. Calvin believed the psalmist was referring to Heaven, meaning that God rises above the world. I'm not really sure, but I lean toward the fact that he's reminding us that because God is so holy, His ways are way beyond our finding out. He is perfect; He is blameless. His works and wonders can be seen by all generations. His ways are obvious to those who desire to see Him. His ways are holy; his greatness is incomparable. His power is visible! We can stand in strength because we have such a powerful God to lean on!

5. How does His greatness and His power encourage you today? How does this section of Scripture breathe life into your soul? (If it doesn't, pray that it would!)

In verse 15 Asaph is remembering the exodus of his people. God redeemed them, delivering them from the bondage they were under in Egypt by a display of divine power.

6. In verse 15 why do you think Asaph refers to God's "arm" redeeming the people instead of His hand? Why do you think that's significant?

7. Do you feel weak in any area? How does the picture of God's mighty arm strengthen your heart?

Asaph's answer to his issues was to get "God-centered" instead of "me-centered." We, too, need to look up and focus on God instead of our emotions and circumstances.

8. Do what Asaph did in verse 6: Let the Spirit diligently search your heart. In what areas of your life are you more "me-centered" than "God-centered"? How does that distort your perspective? What can you do about it?

I read a devotion by Corrie Ten Boom called "Look Up." I'd like to share it with you because it's such a great reminder of where our eyes should be. If you don't know anything about her, she was in a prison camp during World War II for hiding Jews. She was an amazing woman of faith. She wrote, "In the concentration camp we went through the ordeal of being stripped of all our clothing and made to stand naked for several hours. It was difficult; more cruel, than anything else we experienced. Once, they kept us standing for a long, long time. Suddenly a skylark began to sing in the sky, and all the prisoners looked up to listen to that bird's song. As I looked at the bird, I saw the sky, and I thought of Psalm 103:11. 'O love of God, how deep and how great; far deeper than man's deepest hate.' God sent that skylark daily for three weeks, exactly during roll call, to turn our eyes away from the cruelty of men to the ocean of His love. Thank You, Lord, that You are always willing to turn our eyes in the right direction unto You."

9. How does the story above minister to you? Will you also allow God to turn your eyes unto Him?

See you tomorrow, ladies. May the Most High -- possessor of Heaven and earth -- be your focus and your "**Reason to Rejoice**" today.

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory. How did it encourage you this week?

1. Read Psalm 77:1-20. Go back and read verses 10-16. Wow. What a great section. What's the main point or thought?

In verse 16, Asaph continues his discussion about the exodus and the parting of the Red Sea. His memory is back and sounds more passionate than ever!

2. Read Exodus 14:13-31. Can you summarize what happened? How is this story significant to your life, today?

3. Read Psalm 77:16-20 again. The poetic way Asaph depicts the scene is quite colorful. Any new thoughts? What new details does Asaph add?

4. Who was in control of this whole incident? Who directed the sea, the wind, and the earth? Who won this victory? Do you believe that same God is STILL in control of everything??? If so, is there anything that He can't do? (Luke 1:37)

5. Read verse 19. Where was "His" way? What does it mean that His footsteps were not known?

The immediate meaning of this verse is that no visible traces of God's victory remained because the waters of the Red Sea rolled back. Sometimes God acts in mighty, visible ways, and His steps are traceable. But other times, He leads us, and His footsteps cannot be seen. But just because they aren't traceable, doesn't mean they aren't trustworthy. When we can't "see" His footsteps, we must continue to persevere, trusting in His promises, walking diligently and purposefully. Keep looking for Him; keep focusing on Him. **Will we believe God because of what He does for us, or do we simply believe God because of who He is?**

6. Read verse 20. Seems like an abrupt ending, doesn't it? How do you think it ties in with the rest of the psalm?

7. God leads us in mighty ways at times, like in the parting of the Red Sea. But He also leads us in tender and loving ways, like a shepherd. Have you missed Him because you're looking for signs and wonders, instead of your Good Shepherd?

Notice that even though Asaph mentions Moses and Aaron, it was still God who was leading them by the hand. They were simply instruments.

8. Notice the progression... I cried (vs 1), I remembered (vs 3), I considered (vs 5) and I said (vs 10). Can you choose to focus on God today, like Asaph? Where are you in the progression?

"God's way is holy, so obey Him. His way is hidden, so trust Him"
(Warren Wiersbe)

