

Are You Too Near the Pain to See the Plan?

It looked like an abstract painting. A notation on the easel invited the viewer to find the face of Abraham Lincoln.

I stared at the painting for a long time, observing it close up and from different angles. It baffled me. "There's no Abraham Lincoln there," I said resignedly and headed for the exit.

But at the door, I turned for one last look. I saw him. From 100 feet away, he stood out clearly. The face of Lincoln filled the canvas. I had given up because I had been too near. I saw only when I had distance and perspective.

The Promise

Your circumstances may be as confusing to you this day as that abstract painting. The Bible and your faith tell you there is a pattern somewhere in the drawing of your life, but you can't see it. You're too close to the hurt to view the healing and too near the pain to figure out the plan.

Psalm 105 recalls all the wonderful things God did for Israel as an encouragement for you to not lose heart. It encourages you, like Israel, to take the long view and say, "Give thanks to the Lord. ... Sing to him ... tell of all his wonderful acts. ... Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles" (vv. 1-7).

He is the God who does not forget His promises (vv. 8-11). He wants your heart to be saturated with the understanding that He is absolutely faithful—"He remembers his covenant forever" (v. 8).

Remembrances

God doesn't forget, but we do. You will be tempted constantly in your present trial to forget God's care for you in the past. That's why the rest of the psalm focuses on all the things God did for His people, from the migrations of their forefathers, the patriarchs (vv. 12-15), to the descent into slavery in Egypt (vv. 16-25), to the deliverance under Moses from bondage (vv. 26-38), to His care for them in wilderness wanderings (vv. 39-41) and to joyous entry into the land of promise (vv. 42-45). In each epoch, God was with them—as He is with you.

Nomads (vv. 12-15). God cared for His people even before He brought them into a land of their own. Perhaps you feel like a nomad. Others have stable positions or families and blossoming careers. But you don't know where you're going next. Your life at this moment is not stable, and everything is uncertain.

Can God be with you in such a time? He was with Abraham—described as a “stranger” and one who “wandered” (vv. 12-13). In your weak and vulnerable times, God protects you (vv. 14-15).

Hard times (vv. 16-25). Both in famine (vv. 16-22) and slavery (vv. 17-25), the Lord provided for the needs of His people.

Famines aren't limited to the physical. You may be famished for acceptance, love, wholesome relationships or physical health. But God is already working out a plan so you won't starve, so you'll have plenty. He did that for Israel with Joseph.

Have you noticed God “sent” Joseph into Egypt? Joseph, at the time his brothers sold him into slavery, surely didn't feel like God was “sending” him. It was his worst nightmare come true. Only by gaining the distance of time did everyone, including Joseph, understand that God engineered the whole

thing.

God also knew your famine was going to occur. Just as He sent Joseph down into Egypt years in advance to prepare for Israel's future well being, so He has anticipated your needs and instituted His rescue plan before your trouble ever began. As a bonus, in the place of difficulty, He also can make you very fruitful (vv. 24-25).

Escape (vv. 26-38). You probably would never select the means God chooses to get you out of a jam. If you had been in Egypt, would you have chosen the self-effacing, unarmed, 80-year-old fugitive Moses as deliverer? What a laugh. He had no power to throw against the might of Egypt.

Don't demand God use your solutions. He'll use things you never thought of. He'll cause you to emerge from adversity laden with resources (v. 37) rather than impoverished.

Transition (vv. 39-41). From Egypt, Israel went into wilderness. The Psalmist remembers, however, only the good things—omitting any mention of Israel's complaints about hunger and thirst, or rebellions against God and His leaders.

How good the Lord is. He allows us to exercise a selective memory in which we recount what He did while forgetting all our own back talk and grumbling. You won't have any complaints when God has finished with you, so why gripe today?

Fulfillment (vv. 42-45). If today is not one of joy, God's tomorrow will be. The Lord will never leave or abandon you in "Egypt" or "the wilderness." He intends to bring you into a place where the ecstasy far outweighs the agony. (See Rom. 8:18-25.) He has all eternity to make good His promise.

George O. Wood *is the General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God.*