

Finding Calm in the Stormy Waters

An elderly man passed his granddaughter's room and saw her kneeling by her bed reverently repeating the alphabet. "What on earth are you up to?" he asked.

"I'm saying my prayers," replied the little girl. "But I can't think of exactly the right words tonight, so I'm just saying all the letters. God will put them together for me, because He knows what I'm thinking."

Perhaps you are like that little girl, unable to articulate to the Lord what is on your heart. Or maybe you are like David in this psalm—profoundly able to express how you feel even during the worst of times. In either case, the Lord knows your need and hears your prayer.

Out of Control

In Psalm 69 David begins with a desperate appeal to be rescued from a situation which had grown from bad to worse.

"Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my throat. I sink in deep mire; there is no standing place. I have come into the watery depths, and a stream overflows me" (Ps. 69:1-2).

Are you up to your neck in danger, sinking and engulfed in flood? Have you lost your voice yelling for help or looked so long for God to show up that your eyesight has failed (v. 3)?

Your worst moments in any crisis come when three elements converge: You don't think you can survive; you clearly see your problems (v. 4); but you can't see God.

You may alternate between feeling you're getting what you

deserve (v. 5) and that your predicament is completely unfair ["I am forced to restore what I did not steal" (v. 4)].

Guilt and Innocence

Amid personal peril, David brings his guilt to the Lord and asks that it will not adversely affect others (v. 6). It's bad enough when you reap the consequences for your own sins; it's far worse when you have to live with the fact that others you love now suffer because of you.

But David also affirms his innocence. Some of his present danger resulted not from his wrongdoing, but as a consequence of his own loyalty to God (Ps. 69:7–12). Prophetically, David speaks beyond himself to describe Jesus who experienced suffering, opposition and rejection solely because He did right (Ps. 69:9; John 2:17).

The Lord's example stirs us to set aside personal discomfort for the well-being of others. "We who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak and not please ourselves. ... For even Christ did not please Himself. But as it is written, 'The insults of those who insulted You fell on Me'" (Rom. 15:1, 3; ref. Ps. 69:9).

Heartbroken and Helpless

It's hard to stay on high ground for long when you are hurting. David caroms away from the nobility in his suffering to refocus on his personal need. How wonderful if the psalm could close at the end of verse 13. But real life doesn't have such quick resolutions to deep needs.

We struggle with God's timing. Our faith says, "In an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of Your mercy" (Ps. 69:13); our emotions say, "For I am in trouble; answer me quickly" (v. 17). David prays, "That I may not sink ... May the stream not overflow me ... Do not hide Your face" (vv. 14-15,

17). Loneliness compounds adversity a thousand times over: “and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none” (v. 20). No wonder this same passage is used to describe Christ’s death at Calvary: “And in My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink” (Ps. 69:21; John 19:28-30).

Anger or Forgiveness

David releases a geyser of anger against those who wronged him. (See Ps. 69:22–28.) He prays for God to damn them eternally: “Let them be blotted out of the book of the living and not be written along with the righteous” (v. 28). If you feel like praying this against another person, it’s because they have badly wounded you.

Jesus could have damned the whole human race from His cross, but He chose not to pray this prayer. He erased the imprecatory words of this psalm by replacing them with “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Your attitude and prayer may determine whether a person who has wronged you finds life or death, salvation or damnation.

Safe at Last

David revisits his peril for one final brief moment: “But I am poor and in pain; may Your salvation, O God, set me secure on high” (Ps. 69:29). Notice how this short summary contrasts with the earlier torrent of words describing his desperate need (vv. 1–5, 13–21).

As you continue praying through horrible times, calm does come. Your cries for help are not as prolonged as earlier because you have had moments to contemplate the Lord and gain the long view of His dealings not only with you, but also with your enemies.

Your mood changes. Time in God's presence has removed the sense of imminent danger. In contrast to being "weary of my crying" from "a parched throat" (Ps. 69:3), you now sing praise to the Lord (v. 30) and rest content in God's promises for your future (vv. 33–36).

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