

What to Do When Hope Deferred Makes Your Heart Sick

Have you ever had something happen to you so bad or hurtful that you simply couldn't do what this song in Psalm 98 asks, "Sing a new song to the Lord"?

I like to compare this psalm with the story of the two downcast followers of Jesus who left Jerusalem on Easter morning, believing He was dead (see Luke 24:13-24).

Those two disciples were in no emotional shape to sing. When Jesus came to them unrecognized, "they stood still, their faces downcast" (Luke 24:17). The hard reality of death had not destroyed their love for Him, but it had demolished their hope, as indicated by their past-tense statement: "We had hoped" (v. 21).

Like them, have you lost hope? A hard experience has slain your expectation of good things, but not your love for God?

This psalm asks you to "sing to the Lord a new song" (v. 1). Why? The psalm answers the question; but before looking at its response, let's probe our own hearts.

How fresh is your experience with the Lord? Do you feel He is not working in your life? Has depression placed a frog in your throat so you don't sing?

Start With an Old Song

Before singing to the Lord a new song, perhaps you need to sing an old one. It's appropriate and helpful to meditate upon your own history with God, from the womb to the present.

I have personally found great strength in present trials by rummaging through my past and finding specific instances or processes in which God met me. I remember times I did not

think I could make it, but He brought me through. Those experiences of the Lord's help are permanently etched into the pathways of my own personality.

It's today we often have difficulty trusting Him. As Christians we have a wonderful yesterday and a secure tomorrow—but the here and now frequently finds us failing to connect God's past and future help with our present need.

Composing a New Song

This psalm is not written by one going through trial. The verbs are past tense—indicating that God's activity in this crisis is now completed (vv. 1-3). We sing other songs and pray other prayers while in the midst of crisis. But this psalm is a reminder that we have a song to sing when God brings us through the hour of difficulty. Your painful experience right now is forming the material from which you will write a new song of praise to God. When this time of peril is over, it will all make sense.

One day you too will look backward over the trail of your climb out of a lonesome, deep valley and sing full-heartedly all the words of these verses.

The reason for singing the new song is "the Lord has done marvelous things." Marvelous may be the last word you would have used to describe God's dealings with you while in the midst of your fight for survival. In such a time, God does not appear to know what He is doing—and for our part, we may feel He is leading us to complete ruin.

But trust Him. The day will come when you look back over your shoulder and honestly say to the Lord, "What You did was marvelous." Let, therefore, the future theme of joy celebrated in this psalm be an encouragement for you today—let it be a tuning instrument of the Spirit for the out-of-tune sorrow now in your heart.

The Lord's activity, however, is far more than just personal to me. He works on behalf of His people. In Jesus Christ, God has provided the most vital thing we need—salvation. And the work of His right hand and holy arm in raising Jesus from the dead is now being revealed to the nations, to all the ends of the earth (vv. 2-3).

The fact that God remembers His love and faithfulness assures us He is the one constant in our lives that cannot be taken from us. He can be depended upon absolutely. And He seeks to incorporate the characteristics of His personality into our own so we too can have a faithful and enduring love.

Let Everybody Sing!

In celebration of His marvelous salvation, the choir (v. 4) and orchestra (vv. 5-6) are ordered to strike up the music. Then, nature in personification also joins in (vv. 7-8). When everything is right with us, it seems like everything is right with the world as well. It's like walking through a park with the one you love—even the rivers “clap their hands” and the “mountains sing together for joy” (v. 7).

As you consider the outcome of God's dealings with you, it becomes apparent that He is a far better decision maker than you. He operates on fixed principle (v. 9), whereas we often act from emotions and whim. His fairness in “judging” gives us the assurance that all humans will be handled with “equity.”

If you have allowed bitterness, resentment, self-pity, or blame into your spirit so that there's a frog in your throat keeping you from singing this psalm, the same risen Lord who appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus desires to come to you today and open your heart to understand the Scriptures. Jesus is very much alive and you have a glorious future.

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