

When Difficulty Arises, This Prayer Perspective Can Help

Two men stood next to one another on the crowded subway platform in New York City. It was rush hour.

The train came to a stop and the doors flew open. As the men stepped forward to enter, a man who had become nauseous on the crowded, swaying train lost it, and soiled one of the two men.

The doors slammed shut. The train sped off into the night with its red rear lights disappearing into the darkness. The two shocked men remained standing on the platform. Said the one who had been the recipient of the unexpected eruption, “Why me?”

That’s the spirit reflected in Psalm 44, a troubling prayer of accusation against God himself.

Glorious Past

It begins with a remembrance of what “our fathers have told us”—namely, that the planting of Israel in the land resulted from God’s efforts and not theirs (vv. 1–3). An underlying complaint within the psalm is that God’s activity in our lives does not seem evenly placed. He appears to have moments of intersection with us when His activity bursts forth in plenty, followed by long periods when nothing seems to be happening.

In such a period of seeming abandonment, all that is left are the memories of God’s power and love: “It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you loved them” (v. 3).

In the second stanza (vv. 4–8), the psalmist relates the “correct” theology, which should be held to through tough

times: Victory still results from God's activity and not ours; therefore, trust and praise are due Him.

Disastrous Present

But quickly, confidence and faith disintegrate before the reality of the present situation. In the third and fourth stanzas (vv. 9–12, 13–16), God seems to have rejected and forgotten His people. Despair and disgrace reign. We walk in defeat and shame whenever we feel God has abandoned us. It's the worst sting of all—God Himself gives us up to be plundered, devoured, scattered and sold for a pittance.

Despairing Question

The fifth and sixth stanzas (vv. 17–19, 20–22) forthrightly proclaim lack of cause for God's treatment: "All this is come on us, yet we have not forgotten you nor have we dealt falsely in your covenant" (v. 17).

Have you ever felt that way? "Why me? Why is God picking on me? Why has He allowed all these hateful circumstances into my life? I just don't understand it."

Irony melancholy settles on the prayer as the psalm writer dejectedly laments that God's treatment of us is no different than sheep—we are alive only to be killed (v. 22). It is a premise to which Paul shouts an emphatic "No!" in Romans 8:36-37.

Why does Paul say no? He says no to being a victim, but says yes to being a victor: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."

Thus, the New Testament response to this psalm is to turn upside down its mentality. In our worst moments, we may feel God has forgotten us (v. 24).

Negative circumstances are not a sign of His rejection of us; rather, He is working for the good (Rom. 8:28).

Plaintive Cry

The seventh and eighth stanzas (vv. 23-26) contain the pathetic plea for God's intervention from a person who really doesn't seem to expect God to do anything.

But God is never asleep at the switch. He is not a Baal or false god who gets lost in reverie, fails to pay attention, takes long journeys, or naps (1 Kings 18:27).

This psalm gives us perspective on praying when we are in difficulty. The content of the psalm is testimony to the fact that our prayers are more filled with doubt than with faith. The Lord, in His mercy, does not strike us down for saying things about Him which are not true. He lets us vent, even when our venting is in error.

When you feel, "Why me?" you don't have to pathetically implore the Lord, "Wake up. Remember Your love and do something!"

Rather, because of who Jesus is, you can pray boldly, with faith and confidence (Rom. 8:38-39).

If there are moments when you feel Psalm 44 describes where you are, acknowledge those feelings to the Lord. But then go past those feelings to the real truth: The Lord does hear, know and help. {eo}

George O. Wood *is general superintendent of the Assemblies of God in the United States. Visit his website at .*