

Honest to God – Tough Questions from the Psalms (Part 1 of 8)

“Why Do You Hide Yourself?”

Psalm 10

Mark Vroegop

1 Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

2 In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor; let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised. 3 For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD. 4 In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, “There is no God.” 5 His ways prosper at all times; your judgments are on high, out of his sight; as for all his foes, he puffs at them. 6 He says in his heart, “I shall not be moved; throughout all generations I shall not meet adversity.” 7 His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue are mischief and iniquity. 8 He sits in ambush in the villages; in hiding places he murders the innocent. His eyes stealthily watch for the helpless; 9 he lurks in ambush like a lion in his thicket; he lurks that he may seize the poor; he seizes the poor when he draws him into his net. 10 The helpless are crushed, sink down, and fall by his might. 11 He says in his heart, “God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it.”

12 Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted. 13 Why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart, “You will not call to account”? 14 But you do see, for you note mischief and vexation, that you may take it into your hands; to you the helpless commits himself; you have been the helper of the fatherless. 15 Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer; call his wickedness to account till you find none.

16 The LORD is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his land. 17 O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear 18 to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.

The book of Psalms is unlike any other book of the Bible. And that is why we love it so much. I’m sure your experience is similar to mine in that the book of Psalms is a place that you turn to in the midst of some of the most emotionally challenging moments of your life. I can think of countless times when God used a particular Psalm at just the right moment in my life. I’m sure you can think of times like that too. In fact, some of the Psalms are like sacred ground for me.

Why is that? Why are the Psalms so helpful? There is certainly not one simple answer to that question, but let me suggest one important reason: **the Psalms are honest.** By that I mean that the Psalms have an ability to put to voice and verse what we feel deeply in our souls. They say things and address some of the difficult and conflicting emotions that run through our hearts. The Psalms address raw and sometimes scary questions about life, God, and pain, while at the same time leading us back to biblical thinking. Life is hard; the Psalms are honest; God is good.

That's why we love them. The Psalms are not afraid of tough questions, raw emotion and painful experiences. The Psalms live where you live. And yet they don't leave us there. They deal honestly with the pain but point us back to the ultimate question: Who is God? The Psalms serve as a bridge between the pain of life and the power of God.

Honest to God

Throughout June and July we are going to look at some of these important and honest questions that we find in various Psalms. Last summer we looked at wide variety of Psalms – a Song for Every Season. Last year we saw the variety of issues that the book of Psalms addresses. This summer I want to dial specifically into the hard questions – the kind of questions that are often asked because of hardship, pain or difficulty.

Here are the questions we'll be addressing:

- Why do you hide yourself? (Psalm 10)
- Why have you forsaken me? (Psalm 22)
- What is the measure of my days? (Psalm 39)
- Why are you downcast, O my soul? (Psalm 42)
- Why should I fear in times of trouble? (Psalm 49)
- How long, O Lord? (Psalm 79)
- Where is your steadfast love? (Psalm 89)
- How shall we sing the Lord's song? (Psalm 137)

I can promise you that you will ask one of these questions at least once in your lifetime. Some of us know what it is like to ask these questions at multiple points in our lives. You may be asking one of these questions even today.

The heart behind this series is to help prepare you for those difficult moments in life when you experience suffering. Life is hard. It is only a matter of time until you experience the real effects of a broken world through injustice, personal conflict, an unexpected illness, the loss of a job, the death of a loved one, or the betrayal of someone close. And in those moments you need a place to go with your pain.

The Psalms are uniquely helpful because they avoid two common and unhelpful ways that people often try to deal with their pain:

Denial – Suffering at any level creates tough and difficult questions, but some people simply do not even want to acknowledge the reality of what they are struggling with. They almost create a fictitious existence as they cover-up what is really going on deep in their soul. They struggle to come to terms with "what" happened.

Dissection – Some people have a fundamental presupposition that if something bad has happened then they must have done something wrong. Therefore, they over-analyze the circumstances, the contributing factors, their own soul, or even God. They relentlessly pursue the “why” question.

The Psalms, like the book of Job, help us avoid either of these two pitfalls when it comes to suffering and pain. They deal honestly with the pain while at the same time pointing us to God.

Psalm 10: The Pain of Injustice

Our text today deals with the problem of unresolved evil or injustice. We don’t know about the background or the setting in which this Psalm was written. Sometimes Psalms were written because of a national crisis. Others were written because of a personal crisis. It appears that this Psalm was written with the latter in mind.

This is an important and helpful Psalm because it speaks to something all of us are familiar with, or will be eventually, at some level. Have you ever been wronged by someone? Have you ever watched as people were unfairly treated? That is painful enough. But what makes the situation even more challenging is when the person continues his campaign of pain and seems to get away with it. The pain is hard to deal with, but the frustration connected with the injustice is painful at an entirely different level. You’ve probably thought what you would do if you had the power to expose them, stop them, and punish them. But often we are left powerless. So what do you do?

Tough, Honest, Emotional Questions

The Psalmist turns his attention to God with some hard and honest questions about the problem of injustice. He doesn’t talk about the problem of evil’s success as if it is a theoretical idea. This is deeply personal, and the Psalmist asks God two challenging questions. You see the problem is not just the injustice; the issue is the injustice *and* God’s seemingly lack of intervention. It appears that God isn’t doing anything.

Notice the significance of what verse one says. These questions are pregnant with pain:

“Why, O LORD, do you stand far away?” The Psalmist is deeply troubled that God seems like he is too far removed from what is happening on earth. The word for “LORD” here is the personal, sacred, and powerful name Yahweh. It is the name that means “I am,” and it was the very name that God gave to Moses at the burning bush. God told Moses, “I am who I am . . . say to this people of Israel, ‘I AM’ has sent me to you” (Ex. 4:14). This was the powerful name that delivered his people from the clutches of Egypt, the most powerful nation on earth, by making a mockery of their false gods.

This was the same God who dwelt in their midst, who led them in the wilderness, who inhabited the tabernacle and temple. This was the God who defended his people and delivered them. Yahweh is a deliverer. He is a rescuer. He is the God who brought his people out of slavery (Ex. 20:1).

But in this moment, God is standing “far away.” Feel this image. God’s people are in trouble, and it is obvious. Yet it feels as if God is distant, removed, and uninvolved. It feels as if God is unmoved, uninterested, and frankly, uncaring. The Psalmist feels as if God is no longer helping him. The second question is even more loaded.

“Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” This complaint seems to move things from passive to active disinterest. It is not just that God is standing far away, now the problem is that the Psalmist feels as if God is actually hiding himself. The word “hide” can be translated as secret, hidden, and concealed. But it also can have more emotional meanings such as to withdraw, to ignore, and even to be hypocritical, pretending to be one thing while actually being another.

Does this make you at all uncomfortable? It should. He is basically telling God that he feels as if God is not being “God-like.” If you are not uncomfortable with this, then you probably do not really understand what the Psalmist is saying here. The Psalmist is deeply struggling not just with his pain; he is struggling with God. The injustice is one pain; God’s lack of intervention is a deeper pain.

Let’s pause here for a moment, and let me give you two pastoral observations. First, there are some of you who I know have suffered great injustices, and it has deeply affected your relationship with God. And I just want you to know that there are many people in history and in the Bible who wrestled with God over these things. Don’t allow the enemy to convince you that because you are struggling and wrestling and hurting over God’s will that somehow you have abandoned the faith. There needs to be room in the Christian faith for honest lament.

Second, the Psalmist will not stay here, but it is very important to note that he starts here. This is especially important if you are counseling someone in pain or if you are trying to walk through pain with a friend. Sometimes the people most afraid of honest questions are the people around and ministering to people in pain. There is something scary about seeing a friend in great pain, but there is something even scarier about the questions that come during the pain. I would just caution you not to be like Job’s three friends who tried to protect God from hard questions.

Sometimes people are in verse 1 of Psalm 10 and they just need time to get to the end. Be a good friend. Don’t panic by minimizing the pain or depth of the questions. Can someone sin with his questions? Sure he can. However, we have Psalms like this in the Bible for a reason.

We all need a place in our understanding of God and suffering for the allowance of tough, honest, and emotional questions.

The Frustrating Reality of Injustice

The next section (verses 2-11) is a list of the things that the Psalmist is experiencing. These are the things that he sees and is struggling with. Although God knows all about these things, the Psalmist pours out his heart to God. He does so not to inform God, but to ask for help. And it is

helpful to his soul to identify the issues that are affecting him. It is also good for us to hear because I'm sure that there are things here that all of us can relate to.

There are a number of things the Psalmist identifies. I've grouped them into five categories:

1. Outrageous Pride (vv 2-4)

The Psalmist is frustrated because the unidentified person ("the wicked") acts as if there is no principle of right and wrong and as if God can be totally disregarded. Verse two indicates that the wicked person is oppressing the poor or the weak, and that there are schemes or plans that are still ongoing. We are not told what the specifics are, and the point here is simply that there is oppression, unfairness, and injustice happening.

However, the oppression is only part of the problem. What is really frustrating is the fact that this wicked person is oppressing people with an outrageous level of arrogance. Notice what we see in verses 2-4:

- **"in arrogance** the wicked hotly pursues the poor" (v 2)
- "the wicked **boasts** of the desires of his soul" (v 3)
- "the one greedy for gain **curses and renounces the Lord**" (v 3)
- "In the **pride of his face** the wicked does not see him" (v 4)
- "all his thoughts are '**there is no God**'" (v 4)

The Psalmist wants God to do something, not only to stop the injustice and oppression, but to also show the wicked man that he is not God! The wicked man is living as if he is above consequences, and this is grieving the Psalmist's heart.

2. Frustrating Success (vv 5-6)

What makes this situation even more challenging is the fact that everything seems to be going the wicked man's way. He is prospering in his evil, and it is feeding his pride and oppression. He does not live with any sense of concern for what God may think about his actions. *5 His ways prosper at all times; your judgments are on high, out of his sight; as for all his foes, he puffs at them (Psalm 10:5).*

Further, his success is creating an evil self-confidence. Without any direct consequences, the evil man is becoming more and more convinced that he is invincible. *6 He says in his heart, "I shall not be moved; throughout all generations I shall not meet adversity" (Psalm 10:6).*

3. Abusive Speech (v 7)

One of the most common weapons of injustice and oppression are words, and the wicked man uses his mouth to wage war on others. Notice that verse seven describes his mouth as being "filled with cursing, deceit, and oppression." The NIV renders this as "threats and trouble." His

words are sneaky and destructive. His mouth is constantly churning out wicked statements, commands, and hurtful words – “*under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.*” They create so much pain, and there seems to be no end to it.

4. Intentional Oppression (vv 8-10)

The Psalmist next gives us a picture of the extent of the activities of the wicked man. The oppression is intentional. This evil man is actively plotting, scheming, and waiting for the right moment. Notice the vivid phrases that the Psalmist uses:

8 He sits in ambush in the villages; in hiding places he murders the innocent. His eyes stealthily watch for the helpless; 9 he lurks in ambush like a lion in his thicket; he lurks that he may seize the poor; he seizes the poor when he draws him into his net (Psalm 10:8-9).

And notice the effect: *10 The helpless are crushed, sink down, and fall by his might (Psalm 10:10).* The word “crushed” means to be broken. Some of you know exactly what that feels like. Someone was so cruel to you, something happened to you, and it is like they stole a piece of your soul. You were and are crushed.

The evil of this situation is so egregious because it is something that is happening “on purpose.” When our twins were about four years old, they learned the emotional difference between something that happened “on accident” versus “on purpose.” And as you know, “on purpose” is far worse. One time we overheard them arguing over something that could have been interpreted as being mean. We heard one of them say, “You are such a ‘purpose boy!’” He was mad, but the fact that it happened “on purpose” made it even worse.

5. No Fear (v 11)

The final piece of this frustrating injustice is that the wicked man not only has no fear of consequences, but he has no fear of God! The Psalmist says that the wicked man lives as if God is not even in the picture. Notice the inflammatory statements the Psalmist puts in the mouth of the wicked man. *11 He says in his heart, “God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it.”* The wicked man lives as if God is incompetent, uncaring, or impotent. The reason, of course, is because the wicked man is acting as if he is God.

This is pretty rough list, isn’t it? Have you been on the receiving end of this kind of injustice? Or maybe it was just a few of these things, but you know in part what it feels like to be totally frustrated with the reality of evil. If you’ve never experienced some level of this, it will only be a matter of time.

What I find amazingly helpful here is the fact that Bible meets us where we are. It gives voice to our pain and frustration. It enters our world, lives where we live, and serves as a great comforter to us. What’s more, it is not only that the Bible does this; Jesus does this. Part of the beauty and the compassion of the incarnation of Jesus is that he really understands (Heb. 4:15),

and in his suffering injustice he gave us an example to follow. Listen to the powerful words of 1 Peter 2:21:

²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

Jesus personally endured the frustrating reality of injustice. And when you think that injustice is absolutely winning the day, just remember that it was the injustice of the cross that created the possibility of forgiveness for those who put their faith in Jesus.

The Psalmist could only hope in what God would eventually do to make this injustice right. We who live on the other side of the Cross know what God can do with injustice.

Having Hope in Injustice

So where does this Psalm lead us? In verse twelve, the Psalmist makes an important turn, where he calls upon God and prays for God's help. Take careful note that he asks hard questions and deals honestly with the pain of the situation. But he doesn't stay there. He puts his hope in God despite the unanswered "why" questions. Notice what he does because it is what we should do when we face injustice.

1. Call on God

The Psalmist calls upon God to "arise." The word means to stand up or to prepare to act. He is not just asking God to intervene; he is putting his hope in God's ability to make things right. Even in the midst of injustice and the silence of God, he has enough faith to say "help us, God!" He is asking God for help.

But notice the slight shift in verse thirteen. The Psalmist is not just concerned about his pain or the injustice. He is now also concerned about the glory of God. He's dismayed because of what the injustice says about God.

2. Believe in Faith

Part of the beauty of what happens here is that the Psalmist preaches to his own heart. Verse fourteen is a verse full of faith. Even though he cannot see that God sees, he believes that God does see. And he banks his faith not just on what he hopes will happen; he looks back at what God has done in the past - *14 But you do see, for you note mischief and vexation, that you may take it into your hands; to you the helpless commits himself; you have been the helper of the fatherless (Psalm 10:14).*

The Psalmist knows God's record. Sure, there were seasons of silence, but God is not silent forever. And for those of us who live in the New Testament, there were three days of silence until God arose! Those are the moments we must remember because they serve to strengthen us when injustice is a part of our lives.

3. Trust in His Judgment

The Psalmist asks God to "break the arm of the wicked and evildoer." In other words, he wants God to break the power, the hold, that wickedness and injustice has, but he is relying on the Lord to do it. The Psalmist wants full and complete justice, and he knows that God is the one who can accomplish that - *15 Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer; call his wickedness to account till you find none (Psalm 10:15).*

Again, let me remind you what we read in 1 Peter 2 regarding Jesus as our example, because it is liberating: *"When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23).* He kept trusting in the One who judges justly.

4. Rest in the "Who"

The Psalm ends with the ultimate hope in the midst of suffering and injustice – the "Who." As I have said before: The "Why" question is not as satisfying as the "Who" question. Notice the way in which the Psalmist ends his complaint with a focus on who God is:

16 The LORD is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his land. 17 O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear 18 to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more (Psalm 10:16-17).

And with that we have come full circle. We began this Psalm with an honest and hard question about injustice: "Why, O LORD, do you stand far away?" We end the Psalm with a confident bowing before him: "The LORD is king forever and ever." Through it all we've seen little glimpses of the gospel. We've been reminded that God can take any injustice and use it for his glory and our good.

This is why we love the gospel. This is why we love the Psalms. Life is hard. The Bible, especially the book of Psalms, is honest. God is good.

© College Park Church

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce this material in any format provided that you do not alter the content in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Mark Vroegop. © College Park Church - Indianapolis, Indiana. www.yourchurch.com