

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Summer in the Psalms—Psalm 71

On Sunday Ryan Roeder introduced us to the literary device known as “chiasm” that is used extensively throughout the psalms and the prophets, and also used frequently throughout Scripture in general. Below is the text of Psalm 71, laid out in its chiastic form/structure.

Psalm 71 (NIV)

¹In you, Lord, I have taken refuge;

let me never be put to shame.

²In your righteousness, rescue me and deliver me;

turn your ear to me and save me.

³Be my rock of refuge,

to which I can always go;

give the command to save me,

for you are my rock and my fortress.

⁴Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked,

from the grasp of those who are evil and cruel.

⁵For you have been my hope, Sovereign Lord,

my confidence since my youth.

⁶From birth I have relied on you;

you brought me forth from my mother's womb.

I will ever praise you.

⁷I have become a sign to many;

you are my strong refuge.

⁸My mouth is filled with your praise,

declaring your splendor all day long.

⁹Do not cast me away when I am old;

do not forsake me when my strength is gone.

¹⁰For my enemies speak against me;

those who wait to kill me conspire together.

¹¹They say, “God has forsaken him;

pursue him and seize him,

for no one will rescue him.”

¹²Do not be far from me, my God;

come quickly, God, to help me.

¹³May my accusers perish in shame;

may those who want to harm me
be covered with scorn and disgrace.

¹⁴ As for me, I will always have hope;
I will praise you more and more.

¹⁵ My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds,
of your saving acts all day long—
though I know not how to relate them all.

¹⁶ I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, Sovereign Lord;
I will proclaim your righteous deeds, yours alone.

¹⁷ Since my youth, God, you have taught me,
and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds.

¹⁸ Even when I am old and gray,
do not forsake me, my God,
till I declare your power to the next generation,
your mighty acts to all who are to come.

¹⁹ Your righteousness, God, reaches to the heavens,
you who have done great things.

Who is like you, God?

²⁰ Though you have made me see troubles,
many and bitter,
you will restore my life again;
from the depths of the earth
you will again bring me up.

²¹ You will increase my honor
and comfort me once more.

²² I will praise you with the harp
for your faithfulness, my God;
I will sing praise to you with the lyre,
Holy One of Israel.

²³ My lips will shout for joy
when I sing praise to you—
I whom you have delivered.

²⁴ My tongue will tell of your righteous acts
all day long,

for those who wanted to harm me
have been put to shame and confusion.

Notice that verse 12 is the heart/core of the psalm *“Do not be far from me, My God; come quickly, God, to help me.”*

Q. Right now, presently, how close or far does God feel to you?

Q. When in your life have you felt particularly close to God? When have you felt particularly distant from God?

Q. Describe a time when you experienced God’s help.

We may not always “feel” close to God or sense how close His Presence really is. This is where we need to trust the testimony of Scripture: He is close to us (regardless of whether or not we feel/sense it) and He will help us (in His good way and in His good timing...and His way and timing may be different than ours, but His is always better than ours). Also, and this is important, we should not feel bad or guilty if we don’t feel/sense His Presence/closeness. (Well, if we’re living in active disobedience and don’t feel close to God, that’s a different matter...but even then He is quick to respond to those who repent.)

In this particular psalm (and like many other psalms) the “help” needed was in dealing with “enemies”. I suspect that this could be a reason why it’s sometimes hard to be able to relate to some of the psalms. Most of us don’t feel hotly pursued by an enemy who is out to get us. We don’t feel as though we are in mortal danger. So, it can be kind of hard to relate to the psalmist’s cry for help.

But, recall, this is poetry, which means that we are allowed a little poetic license as we read it. Even if we don’t have enemies who are out to literally/physically kill us (and we can thank God for that) we do have people that are challenging to us. Now, we might feel uncomfortable calling such people “enemies”, which is fine—how we label them isn’t that relevant. We are aware of the teaching of Jesus who calls us to “love our enemies”...and if we’re called to love enemies, then certainly we are called to love those who are challenging to us. I don’t know about you, but I definitely need God’s help with that. Dealing with people who are hard to get along with, who don’t like us (for whatever reason), who we have “personality clashes” with (or perhaps “ego clashes” might be more accurate), those who try our patience, those who are mean/unkind, those who are unreasonable, those who seem to think they’re the only ones on the planet. (Can you relate to any of this?)—such people, for all intent and purposes, can be considered “enemies”. We need God’s help to deal with them in a right and God-honoring way.

Perhaps we could say that anyone we are tempted to treat in a less-than-Christlike way, because of how they treat us, could be considered an “enemy”. With such people we need God’s help.

Q. Describe a tough relationship you’re dealing with (or that you’ve dealt with in the past). What makes it so tough/challenging?

Q. How do you define “enemy”? However you define it, how are you loving your enemies?

In this psalm we see that there are two primary concerns the psalmist has: his own well-being, and God’s reputation. His own well-being is pretty easy to pick up on. We can see his concern for God’s reputation, for example, in verse 8, and verses 14-24. This is important perspective. Like the psalmist, it’s important for us to see/recognize that there’s something bigger than us and our circumstances at play. While it’s perfectly natural to be concerned about our own situation and well-being, being in relationship with God means being concerned about what’s important to Him. In the midst of our life and circumstances, be it good or bad, are we concerned with God being known and glorified? How can God be glorified in my/our life regardless of our situation/circumstances? (*Hint—treating people well, regardless of how they treat us or how we feel about them, brings God glory.*)

Q. Would you describe your present life situation/circumstances as positive or negative? How are you giving (or how can you give) glory, honor, and praise to God in the midst of your present circumstances?

It is clear in this psalm that the psalmist had a long history with God. He mentions, “*since my youth...*” in verses 5 and 17; and he recognized God’s hand in his life from his mother’s womb (verse 6). And he planned on being in relationship with God even when he was old and gray (verse 18).

Q. How has your relationship with God evolved over the years? The psalmist was planning on serving God even in old age. As you imagine the future, how do you see yourself serving God? (As we mentioned in the sermon, for the Christian there is no such thing as “retirement”.)

- Q. The psalmist had in view being a testimony to the next generation (verse 18). What is your relationship with people of generations other than your own (older or younger)? Do you proactively seek out relationships of people of different generations than your own? How so? What are you doing to leave a lasting testimony for the next generations? How have previous generations left a lasting testimony for you?**
- Q. What would you like the next generation to know...about God, about life, etc.? How are you going to communicate that?**