

Psalm 102: Disoriented, Yet Dependent

Psalm 102 shows us *how to pray* and *how important our praying is*. It is a lament by a distressed individual as a part of the people of YHWH, his also-troubled Zion community. Through his own pain and the pain of his community, he continues his dialogue with and about YHWH.

This Israelite poet/psalmist composes a poem that captures the struggle and hope of a broken person in a broken human community. Both personal and community cohesiveness are threatened, yet the last word of the Hebrew translation of **Psalm 102** is “*unshaken.*” (Hebrew *yikon*, in Robert Altar’s *The Book of Psalms*, p. 357)

1. Psalm 102’s superscription is unusual because it scans as a line of poetry and might have been written by the poet as the first line of his poem instead of being added later by an editor. (Altar, p. 353) ***What do you learn about this person?***

Notice that **Psalm 102** is made up of 2 sequences of contrasts: the first sequence is verses 1-22 and the second sequence is verses 23-28. Notice the similar contrasts within each sequence.

How do verses 1-11 contrast with verses 12-22? How do verses 23-24 contrast with verses 25-28?

Both sequences in **Psalm 102** form contrasts between YHWH and everything he created. ***What words would you choose to describe that contrast?***

2. In 102:1-11, which images of suffering did you most identify with? Read the Kellers’ comments about why we all need this psalm. Why do you need **Psalm 102** now and how might it help you pray? (*Songs of Jesus*, p. 249)

3. Writing about **Psalm 102** in the *New Bible Commentary* (“*Request refused, prayer answered*”), Motyer points out how the poet composes “pivotal” poems around key verses. Psalm 102:1-11 “pivots” around verses 6-8 with its images of isolation and loneliness. Psalm 102:12-22 “pivots” around verse 17:

Then, as now the way to deal with life’s dominating pressures is to “turn your eyes upon Jesus”: to refresh ourselves in the vision of God (12, 22), his intentions (13-16, 18-21) and the power and place of prayer (17). (Motyer, *New Bible Commentary*, p. 552.)

What do you want in Lent 2021 when you think about prayer? What place do you want prayer to have and what methods do you want to use?

4. What is your response to this prayer from *The Songs of Jesus* about Psalm 102:12-17?

Lord, I confess that your promise to always hear prayer (verse 17) is of little comfort to me, and it's my fault. *I am so sure of exactly what a good and happy life must look like.* Remind me that sometime your wise love “feeds us with hunger...Lord, spoil my fool's heaven on earth, that I may be saved forever.” Amen (Kellers, *The Songs of Jesus*, p. 250, *italics mine*)

5. In Hebrew, verses 19-22 are all one long sentence, starting in heaven with YHWH and ending on earth in Jerusalem with worship that includes “peoples and kingdoms” (Gentiles). Wow! Our lamenting poet has become a prophetic hymnist! ***What do you envision when you read 102:19-22?***

6. Meanwhile, back in chronological time, human suffering continues and prayer continues.

Translators differ about whether “He” in v. 23 is God or one of the psalmist's enemies, with more thinking of “He” as God than an enemy. Any thoughts about that? I thought of Jesus' short life span and untimely death.

Our psalmist laments and prays again in **102:23-24**. His praying leads him into meditation on God's everlasting being and purpose.

How might you want meditation to be part of your prayer practice in Lent 2021?

7. The past year has been a dark, hostile time for much of the world, for many of us individually, and also corporately for the church, the Body of Christ. We need to lament the loss of life. What other losses need lamenting?

How do the words and actions of this ancient suffering person impact you now, as you reflect on the past year and prepare for Lent 2021?

The author of Hebrews applies this psalm, and in particular verses **102:25-27** to Jesus. ***Read Hebrews 1:1-5a and 10-12.***

How does Psalm 102 help you remember who Jesus is to you and how much you need him.....how much the Church needs him?

Think corporately, about your place in the Body of Christ, and the current state of that Body's health, including our local congregation at Christ Church Plano.

How do the truths of Psalm 102 motivate you to pray for yourself and your brothers and sisters in Christ all over the world—the church of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?