

Don't Face Your Struggles Alone

I want to begin this article with a true story from Church history that took place during the time of the Protestant Reformation. In April of 1552, five young, promising, French seminary students left Lausanne, Switzerland. Having completed their theological education, they were planning to spend a few days in Geneva—possibly with John Calvin—before returning to their native country of France. Because of the French king's hostility to the Protestant faith, these young men knew that they would be facing danger upon their return to their homeland. After leaving Geneva and progressing toward Lyon, France, a stranger joined them on their journey. When they reached their destination, the stranger invited them to his home for a visit. But it was a trap. The five students were arrested and imprisoned. Over the course of the next year they were moved to Paris, taken from one dungeon to another, and then taken back to Lyon. John Calvin sent letters urging these men to remain strong and faithful and assured them of his prayers and the prayers of God's people in Geneva. Calvin and others also began to plan a legal defense. During the ensuing months and into the following year, many attempts were made to have these young men released, including an appeal to the French Parliament. I'll conclude their story in a subsequent article.

As we ponder God's working in the lives of his people, we don't *always* understand the difficult providences that are a part of the lives of some. But what we do see, throughout the history of the church, is the commitment of God's true people to follow Christ, seeking, by grace, to always do God's will, wherever that leads. Christians understand that we've been bought with a price and that we're called to live our lives—not merely for ourselves but for others—in the realization that each *individual* Christian is to be *faithfully* committed to the *corporate* body of Christ no matter the cost. Our lives and our eternal destiny are intertwined with the people of God. These five young seminary students understood this truth completely. They had been taught by John Calvin of the necessity of the local, visible Church for our Christian lives. Calvin writes: “[L]et us learn even from the simple title ‘mother’ how useful, indeed how necessary, it is that we should know her. For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels (Matt. 22:30). Our weakness does not allow us to be dismissed from her school until we have been pupils all our lives. Furthermore, away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or salvation....”

In this series of articles from Psalm 102, we'll be reminded of the necessity of the corporate people of God for our lives and well-being. Most scholars believe that this Psalm was written during the time of the Babylonian captivity of the people of Judah in the sixth century B.C. Knowing this context will help us to better understand—not only the prayers of the Psalmist—but how the prayers and desires of this *individual* for himself cannot be separated from his prayers and desires for the *corporate* people of God. Our spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional well-being is inextricably linked to the covenant people of God and Psalm 102 reminds us of this truth.

—Prayers for God's Help in Distress

The superscription of the Psalm begins with: “A prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his *complaint (troubles)* before the LORD.” In verses 1-2a we read: “Hear my prayer, O LORD; let my cry come to you! Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress!” Some of the words of this Psalm—

including the Psalmist's testimony to the *brevity of life*—may remind us of Job's prayer to God after he had lost nearly everything, including his children and his health. "When I lie down I say, 'When shall I arise?' My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt; my skin hardens, then breaks out afresh. . . . Remember that my life is a breath.'" (Job 7:4a, 5a, 7a) Just as in Job, for the Psalmist there's bodily misery as well as a recognition of the fact that *life on this earth is fleeting*. Here in the first portion of this Psalm we read: "For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace (vs. 3) Because of my loud groaning my bones cling to my flesh (vs. 5) My days are like an evening shadow; I wither like the grass." (vs. 11) Because Jesus Christ has given us the blessing of the local church, no Christian should ever need to face their life struggles alone.

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