

The Bible Unpacked

Comprehensive Study Series

A compilation of the Bible's teaching
for believers established in the faith

paul mallison

39. Hard Times

This series of studies is based on the
Comprehensive Edition of The Bible Unpacked.

There are seven editions of *The Bible Unpacked*.
These aim to address the needs of
NON-CHRISTIANS through to MATURE CHRISTIANS,
from TEENAGERS to ADULTS.

For more information and free downloads go to:
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An Appeal on Behalf of Persecuted Christians

Over 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are denied basic human rights solely because of their faith. (Source: World Evangelical Alliance) Every year many Christians are killed because of their faith.

Through prayer, encouragement and practical assistance we can assist and fellowship with persecuted Christians in their suffering. You can play a vital part in this through contacting one of the organizations listed below. Most produce regular news/prayer letters.

Barnabas Fund – www.barnabasfund.org

It provides material and spiritual support in response to needs identified by local Christian leaders.

Christian Faith and Freedom – www.cffreedom.org

It advocates on behalf of and aids persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity International – www.csi-int.org

CSI works to defend religious liberty and help persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – www.csw.org.uk

It advocates for freedom of religion and justice for persecuted believers.

Compass Direct – www.compassdirect.org

This is a Christian news service providing news, reports, interviews and analyses of situations facing persecuted Christians.

Open Doors – sb.od.org; www.opendoors.org.au

It provides Bibles and other Christian materials, to prepare believers for persecution and equip them to maintain a witness to the Gospel.

Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc/; www.ea.org.au/ea-family/Religious-Liberty.aspx

RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See also www.idop.org
Receive weekly updates by sending a blank email to join-rpb@hub.xc.org.

The Bible League – www.bibleleague.org/persecuted; www.bibleleague.com

It supplies Bibles to persecuted Christians and also provides training.

Voice of the Martyrs – www.persecution.com; www.persecution.com.au

VOM provides Bibles, literature, radio broadcasts and other assistance to help persecuted Christians spread the gospel. They also send material aid.

Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.' Matthew 25:40 NCV

The Bible Unpacked™

Comprehensive Study Series

A compilation of the Bible's teaching for believers established in the faith

39. Hard Times

Composed by Paul Mallison

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Overview of *The Bible Unpacked*


There are seven editions of *The Bible Unpacked*, as shown below. Each edition is an abbreviated version of the next longest edition. As such they have similar structures. Four of the editions have studies based on them, with the same text along with questions. For more details and free downloads of all the material, go to www.thebibleunpacked.net.


 **Two-Minute Edition:** Key Bible teachings for people “on the run”
For giving to non-Christians.


 **Pocket Edition:** Key Bible teachings for seekers of truth
Largely for giving to inquiring non-Christians or young new Christians.

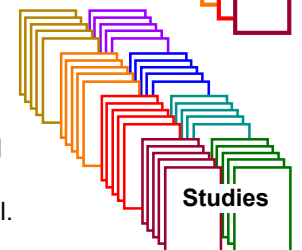
 **Concise Edition:** A look at the Bible’s teaching for new and young believers. For either new or young Christians. Suitable to give to non-Christian friends. Has study series based on it.

 **Foundations Edition:** A compilation of the Bible’s teaching for believers consolidating their faith. For newer Christians. Study series is ideal for studies with newer believers.

 **Intermediate Edition:** A compilation of the Bible’s teaching for believers growing in the faith. For developing a sound understanding of the faith. Studies are excellent for Bible study groups.

 **Comprehensive Edition:** A compilation of the Bible’s teaching for believers established in the faith. For a comprehensive knowledge of the faith. Useful as a study or a devotional tool - and preparing talks. Studies are ideal for studying topics in detail.

 **In-Depth Edition:** A compilation of the Bible’s teaching for teachers and students of the Bible. For Christians keen to gain a deep understanding of their faith. Useful for speakers preparing talks, study groups leaders, Bible students and Bible colleges. It is also in an electronic version, which is a PDF file.



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- I. Getting Right with God
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22. Having Faith in God

- I. Faith and Hope
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A Quick Word

This series of studies aims to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order. There are 40 booklets in the series, based on the 40 chapters of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Comprehensive Edition*. Each booklet has two sections, which can be used for two or more studies.

See *Topics in This Series* towards the end of this booklet for a full listing of all the topics. Note that studying booklets alternatively from the two major sections (*What to Know* and *What to Do*) would add variety.

The material contains Bible verses. Before the verses are headings, which reflect what the verses say – in particular the parts of the verses in *italics*. The verses are sometimes followed by a comment.

The verses often have a brief introduction. Usually these state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the main speakers are:

- Moses – who led the Israelites out of Egypt and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers.

Much care has been taken in order to correctly interpret the verses. Nevertheless, if you encounter a verse that is used to teach something that is contrary to or goes beyond your understanding, assess its use by doing such things as: reading the passage it is from; and considering how its teaching fits in with Scripture as a whole (e.g. interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching).

For more information on *The Bible Unpacked* and free downloads, go to the website: www.thebibleunpacked.net

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Topics in This Series

Section I: What to Know

Part A. God and Spiritual Powers

1. God's Being

- I. Basics
- II. God's Pre-Eminence

2. God's Character

- I. Holy Characteristics
- II. Loving Characteristics

3. Jesus Christ

- I. General
- II. Jesus Christ and God

4. The Holy Spirit

- I. General
- II. God, Christ and the Holy Spirit as One

5. Angels, Satan and Demons

- I. Angels
- II. Satan and Demons

Part B. God and the World: Basics

6. God's Creation

- I. General
- II. God's Creation of People

7. God's Sovereignty

- I. God's Supreme Authority
- II. God's Control over the World

8. God's Word

- I. General
- II. Key Old Testament Covenants

9. The Problem of Sin

- I. General
- II. The Law's Provision for Israel's Sin

10. God's Judgment

- I. Basics
- II. The Manifestation of God's Judgment

Part C. God and the World: Jesus Christ

11. God's Promised Messiah

- I. The Messiah's Identity
- II. The Messiah's Purpose and Person

12. Jesus Christ's Mission

- I. God's Enablement of Jesus Christ
- II. Jesus Christ's Ministry, Death and Resurrection

13. Salvation through Jesus Christ

- I. Salvation from Sin
- II. Salvation for the World

14. The New Order

- I. Jesus Christ and the Law's Diminished Role
- II. Key Elements of the New Order

15. 'The Last Things'

- I. Jesus Christ's Return and the Final Judgment
- II. The Afterlife

Part D. God and His Own People

16. The Standing of God's People

- I. Belonging to God
- II. Being 'in' Jesus Christ

17. Keys to God's Interaction with His People

- I. Basics
- II. God's Holy Spirit in His People

18. God's Transformation of His People

- I. General
- II. Spiritual Attributes

19. God's Care of His People

- I. God's Saving of His People
- II. God's Preservation of His People

20. God's Plans for His People

- I. General
- II. God's Plans for Israel

How and in what sense do hard times draw us closer to God (cf. Ps 34:18)?

Can you think of a time when God “responded to suffering” – either in your life or that of someone close to you?

How do you explain times when God apparently does not answer requests of a suffering person/s?

Suggestions for Study Groups

Preliminary matters:

- Beforehand the leader should: check the context of any verses they are not familiar with; and review the questions. If need be, they should compose questions more applicable to the group.
- Each person should have a Bible, for things such as checking a verse’s context. It would also be helpful to have Bible commentaries on hand.
- Pray before beginning the study. Ask God for help in understanding the meaning of the verses and to affect your lives through them. Also pray together at the end.

Doing the study:

- Ideally, read the material and answer the questions prior to the meeting. Then share answers and discuss any issues arising from the material in the meeting.
- Alternatively, read the material and answer the questions in the meeting – reading either aloud as a group or individually (prior to sharing answers). If reading as a group, **try having one person read the headings, another read the verses and another read the comments.** Additionally, a fourth person could read the Bible references.
- Answers need not be limited to only what is mentioned in the material.
- The group should feel free to diverge from the study if related issues arise.

General or concluding questions:

If time permits, conclude with one or more of the following questions:

- What is something that you either: **did not know** before; gained **greater insight** into; or **needed reminding** of?
- What verse would be helpful to memorize and bear in mind during the next week?
- In taking the verses seriously, is there anything you should change in:
 - (a) how you relate to God or to other people; or
 - (b) any other area of your life (e.g. attitudes, values or behavior)?

If so, are there any specific steps you could take to do this?

calls out to me, I will answer him. I will be with him when he is in trouble; I will rescue him and bring him honor.

. . . God has compassion on them, saving and blessing them

LAM 3:22, 32 *The LORD's loyal kindness never ceases; his compassions never end. . . .³²Though he causes us grief, he then has compassion on us according to the abundance of his loyal kindness.*

ZEC 10:6A [GOD:] *I will make the people of Judah strong; I will rescue the people of Israel. I will have compassion on them and bring them all back home.* GNT

Further testimony to God answering prayers in suffering and trouble . . .

Ps 10:17–18 *LORD, you have heard the request of the oppressed; you make them feel secure because you listen to their prayer.¹⁸You defend the fatherless and oppressed, so that mere mortals may no longer terrorize them.*

Ps 34:4, 6 [DAVID:] *I sought the LORD's help and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. . . .⁶This oppressed man cried out and the LORD heard; he saved him from all his troubles.*

. . . Further specific examples of God answering prayers in suffering and trouble

JUDG 3:9, 15A *When the Israelites cried out for help to the LORD, he raised up a deliverer for the Israelites who rescued them. His name was Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. . . .¹⁵When the Israelites cried out for help to the LORD, he raised up a deliverer for them. His name was Ehud son of Gera the Benjaminite, a left-handed man.*

ACTS 12:5, 11 *So Peter was kept in prison, but those in the church were earnestly praying to God for him. . . .¹¹When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from everything the Jewish people were expecting to happen."*

e) Epilogue: God Does Respond to Suffering and Cries

God is near us in hard times and when we pray

Ps 34:18 *The LORD is close to the brokenhearted, and he saves those whose spirits have been crushed.* NCV™

DEUT 4:7 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] In fact, *what other great nation has a god so near to them like the LORD our God whenever we call on him?*

God does not ignore the suffering and cries of the afflicted

Ps 22:24 *He does not neglect the poor or ignore their suffering; he does not turn away from them, but answers when they call for help.*

GNT

God comforts his people in hard times

Ps 23:4 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.* ESV

2COR 1:3–4 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our troubles* so that we may be able to comfort those experiencing any trouble with *the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

God hears the cries of the godly and rescues them . . .

Ps 55:16–18, 22 [DAVID:] As for me, *I will call out to God, and the LORD will deliver me.* ¹⁷*During the evening, morning, and noontime I will lament and moan, and he will hear me.* ¹⁸*He will rescue me and protect me from those who attack me, even though they greatly outnumber me. . . .* ²²*Throw your burden upon the LORD, and he will sustain you. He will never allow the godly to be upended.*

Ps 91:14–15 *The LORD says, “Because he is devoted to me, I will deliver him; I will protect him because he is loyal to me.* ¹⁵*When he*

I. General

Hard times are experienced by all Christians. This reality is reflected in the Bible, notably in Job and Psalms. But the Bible also shows that there are a number of practical and effective things that we can do when undergoing hard times.

Note that the next chapter looks at experiencing persecution because of one's faith. This current chapter deals with undergoing hard times in general – particularly when one is hurting or “down” – irrespective of whether such times are a result of one's faith or not. As such the responses discussed in this chapter, supplement or reinforce the responses to persecution that are given in the following chapter.

a) Prologue: God's People Still Have Hard Times

(⇒ *God Disciplines His People (I): Reasons*, in 18. *God's Transformation of His People; God Disciplines His People (II): Insights*, in 18. *God's Transformation of His People; I. The Persecution of God's People*, in 40. *Persecution*)

Trouble is characteristic of human life

JOB 5:7 [ELIPHAZ:] *But a person is born for trouble as surely as sparks fly up from a fire.* GW

Ps 90:10A The days of our lives add up to seventy years, or eighty, if one is especially strong. *But even one's best years are marred by trouble and oppression.*

The wicked oppress the righteous and the poor

Amos 5:12 [GOD, TO THE WICKED:] I know how terrible your sins are and how many crimes you have committed. *You persecute good people, take bribes, and prevent the poor from getting justice in the courts.* GNT

Examples of God's people undergoing hard times . . .

1KI 19:3–4 *Elijah was afraid, so he got up and fled for his life to Beer Sheba in Judah. He left his servant there, ⁴while he went a day's journey into the desert. He went and sat down under a shrub and asked the LORD to take his life: "I've had enough! Now, O LORD, take my life. After all, I'm no better than my ancestors."*

JOB 3:24–26 [JOB:] *For my sighing comes in place of my food, and my groanings flow forth like water. ²⁵For the very thing I dreaded has happened to me, and what I feared has come upon me. ²⁶I have no ease, I have no quietness; I cannot rest; turmoil has come upon me.*

. . . and examples of them even attributing their plight to God

RUTH 1:20–21 Then she told them, "Don't call me Naomi any longer! Call me Mara, because *God has made my life bitter.* ²¹*I had everything when I left, but the LORD has brought me back with nothing. How can you still call me Naomi, when God has turned against me and made my life so hard?"* CEV

Why should we praise and thank God during troubled times?

How can we bring ourselves to rejoice in God during hard times? What attitudes and/or actions are needed?

With a difficult time in your life in view – past or present – compose a prayer acknowledging your difficulty but also giving praise and thanks to God. Perhaps draw upon phrases from the verses.

Accordingly, praise and thank God when he answers prayer made in hard times . . .

Ps 34:1–4 [DAVID:] *I will praise the LORD at all times; my mouth will continually praise him. ²I will boast in the LORD; let the oppressed hear and rejoice! ³Magnify the LORD with me! Let's praise his name together! ⁴I sought the LORD's help and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.*

Ps 107:19–21 *They cried out to the LORD in their distress; he delivered them from their troubles. ²⁰He sent them an assuring word and healed them; he rescued them from the pits where they were trapped. ²¹Let them give thanks to the LORD for his loyal love, and for the amazing things he has done for people!*

. . . and rejoice in God's deliverance from hard times

JOEL 2:20–23 [GOD, TO THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH:] *"I will remove the northerners [locusts] from you, driving them to a barren and desolate land—the front toward the Dead Sea and the back toward the Mediterranean. Their stench will rise, and their stinking odor will ascend, because they have done great things." ²¹"Stop being afraid, O land! Rejoice and be glad, because the LORD will do great things. ²²Stop being afraid, O beasts of the field, because the desert pastures will bloom, the trees will bear their fruit, and the fig tree and vine will deliver their wealth. ²³And so be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God, because he has given you the right amount of early rain, and he will cause the rain to fall for you, both the early rain and the later rain as before. ISV*

The "northerners" (v. 20) refers to an incredibly great plague of locusts that had brought desolation to the land.

LAM 3:1–3 *I am the man who has experienced affliction from the rod of his wrath. ²He drove me into captivity and made me walk in darkness and not light. ³He repeatedly attacks me, he turns his hand against me all day long.*

Here Jeremiah speaks on behalf of his nation, as if it was the nation speaking as one.

Note: The desire to contend with God over one's plight

JOB 7:11, 20–21 [JOB, TO GOD:] *"Therefore, I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. . . . ²⁰If I have sinned – what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you set me as your target? Have I become a burden to you? ²¹And why do you not pardon my transgression, and take away my iniquity? For now I will lie down in the dust, and you will seek me diligently, but I will be gone."*

"Therefore" (v. 11) appears to refer to the misery of Job's predicament (cf. vv. 2–5) with the prospect of imminent death (cf. vv. 6–10) – and possibly also his apparent innocence (cf. 6:10, 24, 30). His circumstances being as such, he says that he will not keep silent but speak out and complain to God. In v. 21 Job asks God why he does not forgive his sins and relent, apparently reasoning that his death – by which he would pay for his sin – was now imminent anyway.

Are there any parts of these verses that you identify with – from past or present experiences? If so, how do you?

Is it fair to attribute hard times to God? Is he ultimately behind them?

In hard times, is it permissible and worthwhile to contend with God over your plight?

d) Praise and Rejoice in God

(⇒ [In persecution:] Rejoice, in 40. Persecution)

Praise and thank God amidst trouble . . .

2CHR 20:21–22 He [Jehoshaphat] met with the people and *appointed musicians to play before the LORD and praise his majestic splendor. As they marched ahead of the warriors they said: “Give thanks to the LORD, for his loyal love endures.”* ²²*When they began to shout and praise, the LORD suddenly attacked the Ammonites, Moabites, and men from Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.*

JOB 1:20–21 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. ²¹And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. *The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*” ESV

. . . Moreover, rejoice in God amidst trouble

HAB 3:17–18 [HABAKKUK:] Even though the fig tree does not blossom, and there are no grapes on the vines; even if the olive harvest fails, and the fields produce nothing edible; even if the flock is snatched from the sheepfold, and there is no herd in the stalls— ¹⁸*as for me, I will rejoice in the LORD. I will find my joy in the God of my deliverance.* ISV

Determine and promise to praise and thank God for deliverance

Ps 43:1, 4 O God, declare me innocent, and defend my cause against the ungodly; *deliver me from lying and evil people! . . .* ⁴*Then I will go to your altar, O God; you are the source of my happiness. I will play my harp and sing praise to you, O God, my God.* GNT

Ps 35:17B–18 [DAVID:] *Rescue me from their destructive attacks; guard my life from the young lions!* ¹⁸*Then I will give you thanks in the great assembly; I will praise you before a large crowd of people!*

What is there about your relationship with God that would give some basis for you to make an appeal to him in hard times?

What are some promises of God that can we appeal to in hard times?

Choose one thing from this or the previous section that you would like to remember to include in future prayer during hard times. Say why you chose it.

b) Mourn Loss

The actions spoken of in this section are important for dealing with grief. For they help us express it and “get it out of our system”.

Mourn and weep over loss – particularly deaths

JOHN 11:32–35 Now when Mary came to the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, *my brother would not have died.*” ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the people who had come with her weeping, he was intensely moved in spirit and greatly distressed. ³⁴He asked, “Where have you laid him?” They replied, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵Jesus wept.

ACTS 8:2 *Some devout men buried Stephen, mourning for him with loud cries.* GNT

Mourn and weep before God

JOSH 7:5–6 The people of Ai killed about thirty-six Israelites and then chased the rest from the city gate all the way down to the canyon, killing them as they went down the hill. When the Israelites saw this, they lost their courage. ⁶Then Joshua tore his clothes in sorrow. He bowed facedown on the ground before the Ark of the LORD and stayed there until evening. The leaders of Israel did the same thing. They also threw dirt on their heads to show their sorrow. NCV™

JUDG 20:25–26 The Benjaminites again attacked them from Gibeah and struck down eighteen thousand sword-wielding Israelite soldiers. ²⁶So all the Israelites, the whole army, went up to Bethel. They wept and sat there before the LORD; they did not eat anything that day until evening. They offered up burnt sacrifices and tokens of peace to the LORD.

Openly express your sorrow and grief

1SAM 30:3–4 When David and his men came to the city, they found it burned. Their wives, sons, and daughters had been taken captive. ⁴Then David and the men who were with him wept loudly until they could weep no more.

Est 4:1 Now when Mordecai became aware of all that had been done, *he tore his garments and put on sackcloth and ashes. He went out into the city, crying out in a loud and bitter voice.*

Fast in mourning

2Sam 1:12 *And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.* NKJV

How do you think you would find it helpful to mourn over loss “before” God?

In what way/s do you express your sorrow and grief? What is the point of expressing sorrow and grief openly?

Why fast when mourning?

The sake of God’s “name”

Ps 79:9–10 *Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name’s sake!* ¹⁰*Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?” Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of your servants be known among the nations before our eyes!* ESV

Note: Believe that God will answer your prayer – and tell him so

Ps 6:7–9 [DAVID:] My eyes are weak from so much crying; they are weak from crying about my enemies. ⁸Get away from me, all you who do evil, because *the LORD has heard my crying.* ⁹*The LORD has heard my cry for help; the LORD will answer my prayer.* NCV™

Ps 17:6 *I call to you for you will answer me, O God. Listen to me! Hear what I say!*

c) Ask God for Help (II): Things to Appeal To

God's righteousness

Ps 71:2 *Because you are righteous, help me and rescue me. Listen to me and save me!* GNT

God's steadfast love and faithfulness, . . .

Ps 69:13B *O God, because of your great loyal love, answer me with your faithful deliverance!*

Ps 109:21, 26 But my Sovereign LORD, help me as you have promised, and *rescue me because of the goodness of your love. . . .*
²⁶*Help me, O LORD my God; because of your constant love, save me!*
 GNT

. . . along with God's mercy

DAN 9:18 O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. ESV

Your devotion to and relationship with God . . .

Ps 86:2–3 *Save me from death, because I am loyal to you; save me, for I am your servant and I trust in you.* ³*You are my God, so be merciful to me; I pray to you all day long.* GNT

Ps 119:94 *I am yours, so save me, since I have sought your precepts.* ISV

. . . and God's promises to his people

Ps 119:170 Listen to my appeal for mercy! *Deliver me, as you promised.*

c) Keep in Mind God and His Word

In hard times, remember God . . .

NEH 4:14B [NEHEMIAH, SPEAKING TO HIS PEOPLE ABOUT ENEMY THREATS:] *“Don't be afraid of them. Remember the great and awesome Lord, and fight on behalf of your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your families!”*

. . . and remember what God has done

Ps 77:7–15 [A PSALMIST:] *“Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? ⁸Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? ⁹Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?” Selah ¹⁰Then I said, “I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High.” ¹¹I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. ¹²I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. ¹³Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God? ¹⁴You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples. ¹⁵You with your arm redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph. Selah* ESV

The expression “the years of the right hand of the Most High” (v. 10) speaks of the years when God's power was clearly manifested on his people's behalf. In the face of present difficulties and God's apparent rejection and inactivity (vv. 7–9), the psalmist chooses to remember and meditate on God's wonderful deeds of the past (vv. 10–12, 15), by which he finds encouragement and a revitalized view of God (vv. 13–14).

Moreover, seek God

Ps 77:2A [A PSALMIST:] *In my time of trouble I sought the Lord. I kept my hand raised in prayer throughout the night.*

Do not forget God's word . . .

Ps 119:61 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *The ropes of the wicked tighten around me, but I do not forget your law.*

Note that the following subsections also contain verses from Psalm 119, and are likewise spoken by the psalmist to God.

... Keep meditating on God's word and obeying it

Ps 119:23, 51, 166 Though rulers plot and slander me, *your servant meditates on your statutes*. ... ⁵¹Arrogant people do nothing but scoff at me. *Yet I do not turn aside from your law*. ... ¹⁶⁶I hope for your deliverance, O LORD, and *I obey your commands*.

Job 6:10 [JOB:] Then I would have this comfort and be glad even *in this unending pain*, because *I would know I did not reject the words of the Holy One*. NCV™

Job has primarily in view his obedience to God's commands (cf. CEV), which he had not rejected amidst his great ordeal.

Put your hope in God's word

Ps 119:81 I am weak from waiting for you to save me, but *I hope in your word*. NCV™

Take comfort in God's word ...

Ps 119:50, 52 *This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life*. ... ⁵²*When I think of your rules from of old, I take comfort, O LORD*. ESV

In v. 50 the psalmist says that his comfort in suffering is God's promise which preserves or "revives" (NET) his life, through the hope that it gives (cf. v. 81 ↑).

... and delight in God's word

Ps 119:92, 111 *If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction*. ... ¹¹¹*Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart*. ESV

In v. 92 the psalmist asserts that he would have perished in his affliction if God's law had not "been the source of my joy" (GNT) and so "sustained me with joy" (NLT). The reason why God's word produced such joy may have primarily been because of its promises (v. 50 ↑) and/or because the psalmist "found happiness in obeying" it (CEV).

In hard times, what encourages you to pray to God?

Is there any of the things listed above to ask for, that you had not thought to ask for? What else do you ask God for in hard times?

Apart from God's response, how does persisting in prayer benefit a suffering person – during the suffering and afterwards?

Also, ask God to protect you . . .

Ps 16:1 *Protect me, O God, for I have taken shelter in you.*

. . . and ask God to deliver you

Ps 69:13–14, 18 O LORD, may you hear my prayer and be favorably disposed to me! O God, because of your great loyal love, *answer me with your faithful deliverance!* ¹⁴*Rescue me from the mud! Don't let me sink! Deliver me from those who hate me, from the deep water! . . .* ¹⁸*Come near me and redeem me! Because of my enemies, rescue me!*

Ask God to hear and answer your prayer

Ps 102:1–2 O LORD, hear my prayer! Pay attention to my cry for help! ²*Do not ignore me in my time of trouble! Listen to me! When I call out to you, quickly answer me!*

Persist in prayer to God

Ps 88:1 LORD, you are the God who saves me. *I cry out to you day and night.* NCV™

What should we do in order to seek God in hard times?

In difficult times, how does one take comfort in God's word and delight in it? What attitudes and/or actions are needed?

Is there a verse/s that you turn to in hard times – or do you have one in mind that would be helpful? If so, share it with the group.

d) Trust in God

(⇒ [In persecution:] *Have Faith in God and Pray*, in 40. *Persecution*)

In hard times, trust in God

Ps 31:13–15 [DAVID, TO GOD:] I have heard the slander of many; It is like terror all around me, as they conspire together and plot to take my life. ¹⁴*But I trust in you, O LORD. I say, “You are my God.”* ¹⁵*My times are in your hands. Deliver me from the hands of my enemies and from those who pursue me.* ISV

The statement: “You are my God” (v. 14) implies that the LORD is the one David trusts in as sovereign over his life, the one who held his present and future circumstances in his hands (v. 15a).

Commit yourself to God and take refuge in him, . . .

Ps 31:5 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *Into your hand I entrust my life; you will rescue me, O LORD, the faithful God.*

Ps 57:1 [DAVID, TO GOD:] Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for *in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.* ESV

. . . for God saves and protects those who take refuge in him

Ps 91:1–7, 9–12 *The one who lives in the shelter of the Most High and who abides in the shadow of the Almighty* ²*will say to the LORD, “You are my refuge, my fortress, and my God in whom I trust!”* ³*He will surely deliver you from the hunter’s snare and from the destructive plague.* ⁴*With his feathers he will cover you, and under his wings you will find safety. His truth is your shield and armor.* ⁵*You need not fear terror that stalks in the night, the arrow that flies in the day;* ⁶*plague that strikes in the darkness, or calamity that destroys at noon.* ⁷*If a thousand fall at your side or ten thousand at your right hand, it will not overcome you. . . .* ⁹*“O LORD, you are my refuge!”* *Because you chose the Most High as your dwelling place,* ¹⁰*no evil will fall upon you, and no affliction will approach your tent,* ¹¹*for he will command his angels to protect you in all your ways.* ¹²*With their hands they will lift you up so you will not trip over a stone.* ISV

b) Ask God for Help (I): General

(⇒ *Making Requests*, in 24. *Connecting with God*; and [In persecution:] *Have Faith in God and Pray*, in 40. *Persecution*)

When facing trouble, pray to God . . .

Ps 50:15 [GOD:] *Pray to me when you are in trouble!* I will deliver you, and you will honor me!

JAMES 5:13 *Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone in good spirits? He should sing praises.*

. . . Cry out to God for help

Ps 18:6 In my distress I called to the LORD; *I cried out to my God.* From his heavenly temple he heard my voice; *he listened to my cry for help.*

Likewise, ask God for mercy

Ps 6:2A *Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am weak . . .* NKJV

MATT 15:22 A Canaanite woman from that area came and cried out, “*Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David!* My daughter is horribly demon–possessed!”

In particular, ask God for strength . . .

Ps 119:28 My soul melts away for sorrow; *strengthen me according to your word!* ESV

. . . and ask God to guide you

Ps 143:8 May I hear about your loyal love in the morning, for I trust in you. *Show me the way I should go*, because I long for you.

Ps 61:1B–2 Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer; ²*from the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I, . . .* ESV

The “rock that is higher than I” denotes a place of safety, that seems to be beyond the psalmist’s reach. Quite possibly it alludes to God himself (cf. vv. 3–4).

What is meant by “pour out your heart” to God? How does it benefit a suffering person to do this?

What can we do if we feel isolated from God?

Is it okay and helpful to do such things as ask God how long his inaction is to continue? Or should such things be seen as doubting and questioning God, and so be avoided?

Moreover, accept hard times from God

JOB 2:7–10 Satan left the LORD’S presence and struck Job with painful boils from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. ⁸Job took a piece of broken pottery to scratch himself as he sat in the ashes. ⁹His wife asked him, “Are you still holding on to your principles? Curse God and die!” ¹⁰He said to her, “You’re talking like a godless fool. *We accept the good that God gives us. Shouldn’t we also accept the bad?*” Through all this Job’s lips did not utter one sinful word. GW

1PET 2:19 *God will bless you for this, if you endure the pain of undeserved suffering because you are conscious of his will.* GNT

Peter is speaking of accepting undeserved suffering (cf. v. 18) as being in accordance with God’s will.

What is involved in committing yourself to God, during difficult circumstances?

In what way/s is God a “refuge” for a Christian trusting in him during hard times?

What should we do and what should we not do in order to accept hard times from God?

e) Hope in God and Wait for Him

In hard times, put your hope in God . . .

Ps 42:5–6A [A PSALMIST:] *Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation⁶ and my God.* ESV

LAM 3:19–23 [JEREMIAH:] Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! ²⁰My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. ²¹But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: ²²The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; ²³they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ESV

. . . Look resolutely and expectantly to God

Ps 25:15 [DAVID:] *I continually look to the LORD for help, for he will free my feet from the enemy's net.*

2CHR 20:12 [JEHOSHAPHAT, AS JUDAH FACED INVASION:] O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. *We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.* ESV

As such, wait for God . . .

ISA 8:17 [ISAIAH:] *I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him.* ESV

. . . Wait patiently and quietly

Ps 37:7 *Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!* ESV

LAM 3:26 *It is good to wait quietly for the LORD to save.* NCV™

Ps 31:22A *I had said in my alarm, "I am cut off from your sight."* ESV

Note that the things said in this subsection and following in the last two subsections of this section are not necessarily exemplary in the sense of being things that we ought to say to God amidst hard times. But they do show how one can express anguish to God and suggest that it is acceptable, even productive, for the most part to express such thoughts and emotions.

. . . Consequent longing for God amidst suffering

Ps 42:1–2 *As a deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God! ²I thirst for God, for the living God. I say, "When will I be able to go and appear in God's presence?"*

Prayer despairingly speaking of God as even the source of one's suffering

Ps 88:6–9A *You place me in the lowest regions of the pit, in the dark places, in the watery depths. ⁷Your anger bears down on me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves. (Selah) ⁸You cause those who know me to keep their distance; you make me an appalling sight to them. I am trapped and cannot get free. ⁹My eyes grow weak because of oppression.*

Prayer desperately asking God how long suffering and God's apparent inaction or anger is to continue

Ps 13:1–2 *How much longer will you forget me, LORD? For ever? How much longer will you hide yourself from me? ²How long must I endure trouble? How long will sorrow fill my heart day and night? How long will my enemies triumph over me?* GNT

Ps 89:46 *LORD, how long will this go on? Will you ignore us forever? How long will your anger burn like a fire?* NCV™

a) Express Your Anguish to God

(⇒ Mourn and weep before God, p. 5)

Tell God of your plight and how you feel . . .

Ps 22:11, 14 [DAVID, TO GOD:] Do not remain far away from me, for trouble is near and I have no one to help me. . . . ¹⁴My strength drains away like water; all my bones are dislocated; my heart is like wax; it melts away inside me.

Ps 25:16–19 [DAVID, TO GOD:] Turn to me and have mercy on me, because I am lonely and hurting. ¹⁷My troubles have grown larger; free me from my problems. ¹⁸Look at my suffering and troubles, and take away all my sins. ¹⁹Look at how many enemies I have! See how much they hate me! NCV™

As indicated, the above passages are extracts of prayers (of David). This is the case with many of the verses in the remainder of this chapter. To save space this will not be indicated on each occasion.

. . . Pour out your heart to God

Ps 62:8 Trust in him at all times, you people! *Pour out your hearts before him!* God is our shelter! (Selah)

1SAM 1:10, 15B, 16B She [Hannah] was very upset as she prayed to the LORD, and she was weeping uncontrollably. . . . ¹⁵ . . . [HANNAH, TO ELI THE PRIEST:] I have poured out my soul to the LORD. ¹⁶ . . . I have spoken from my deep pain and anguish.

To pour out your heart to God involves telling God about all your concerns and feelings. In a sense it is to empty your heart of all its troubles, laying them out before God. Being “very upset” (v. 10) and in “deep pain and anguish” (v. 16), Hannah poured out her soul/heart to God (v. 15) in prayer.

Prayer anxiously speaking of God’s seeming remoteness and of apparent isolation from him . . .

Ps 10:1 *Why are you so distant, LORD? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?* GW

Wait with confidence and in the knowledge that God will act

Ps 27:13–14 [DAVID:] I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! ¹⁴Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD! ESV

ISA 64:4 Since ancient times no one has heard or perceived, *no eye has seen any God besides you, who intervenes for those who wait for him.*

Note that God’s action on behalf of his troubled people is not always simply the removal of the cause of their trouble. It may instead involve strengthening his people to cope with the trouble, with inner joy and peace.

What is hope? What does it mean to hope in God, in hard times?

During difficult times, what reason/s do we have to look expectantly to God?

Do you know of a friend undergoing difficult circumstances? What could you do to encourage such a friend to wait patiently and quietly for God?

II. Praying in Hard Times

Prayer is probably the most prominent positive response to hard times. The Bible shows us a great deal about praying to God in such times. The psalms in particular contain a number of prayers of people faced with great difficulties and suffering, from which we can learn much.