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Psalm 69:7-18

7 It is for your sake that I have borne reproach,
that shame has covered my face.

8 I have become a stranger to my kindred,
an alien to my mother's children.

9 It is zeal for your house that has consumed me;
the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.

10 When I humbled my soul with fasting,
they insulted me for doing so.

11 When I made sackcloth my clothing,
I became a byword to them.

12 I am the subject of gossip for those who sit in the gate,
and the drunkards make songs about me.

13 But as for me, my prayer is to you, O Lord.

At an acceptable time, O God,
in the abundance of your steadfast love, answer me.

With your faithful help

14 rescue me

from sinking in the mire;

let me be delivered from my enemies

and from the deep waters.

15 Do not let the flood sweep over me,

or the deep swallow me up,

or the Pit close its mouth over me.

16 Answer me, O Lord, for your steadfast love is good;

according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.

17 Do not hide your face from your servant,

for I am in distress—make haste to answer me.

18 Draw near to me, redeem me,
set me free because of my enemies.

Background

This chapter in the collection of Psalms focuses on the human need for empathy and compassion. Throughout the chapter, we see vivid details about the writer's struggle. This writer is both in "deep mire," "in deep waters," and weary with crying. This is the reflection of someone who has hit rock bottom. In your own devotional period, commit to reading the entire psalm. As a reflection, consider what this psalm might sound like coming from a friend. Would you feel irritated about these complaints? Would you empathize with their struggle? Do you feel compelled to give advice? Are you tired of the "whining?" How would you respond to these reflections in *real life*?

Today's lesson will focus on resilience and truth-telling, even when people refuse to acknowledge your pain.

Read the scripture out loud together.

Discuss with someone in your home. Have you ever felt like someone saw you *and* didn't understand you at the same time? What did that feel like?

What's happening during this passage?

This entire passage reads like a late-night journal entry. The writer laments about "becoming a stranger to my kindred" and an "alien to my mother's children." The writer's faith has become the reason for social exclusion. This pain is all for "your sake," and laments that religious rituals have made them a target. When the writer fasted, they were insulted. When dressed in the ritualistic sackcloth, the writer became the subject of gossip. The hate is so real that "drunkards make songs about me." The news of this person's faithfulness has made them so much of an outcast that the news has spread to all people in the town. So this writer begs that the Lord would "answer," "deliver," and "redeem" them from this agony.

What is the general theme of this text?

This person feels like "a stranger" in their own family. This person feels like an "alien" to their own mother's children. Occasionally in the Bible, we find stories of people who feel so distant from their own family that they find new ways to describe those relationships. Rather than saying, "my siblings don't even know me," this writer says, "I am an alien to my mother's children," highlighting the distance and the space between the family and the storyteller.

This rhetorical device comes up elsewhere in the Bible, like in Song of Solomon. The writer of Song of Solomon muses, "My *mother's sons* were angry with me; they made me keeper of

the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept!” (Song of Solomon 1:6). This technique of referring to your family not through your relationship to them, but through your shared relationship to a third party (the mother) is meant to convey the mood of distance, heart-break, estrangement. Simply put, it’s hard to call someone “brother” when they do not behave like one.

Who does the writer turn to instead?

The writer turns to God for support. The writer names multiple disasters like floods, enemies, deep waters, sinking in mire. The worst part of it all is that the writer cannot turn to their friends, family, or neighbors for support. But this person knows that they can trust in God. So the writer makes demands.

Rescue me.

Answer me.

Deliver me.

Do not let the flood sweep over me.

Do not hide your face.

Turn to me.

Make haste to answer me.

What does this passage say to us as Black Christians today?

We are inundated with stories about evil at every side. We learned that Black people were most vulnerable to the coronavirus due to racist healthcare systems and existing healthcare challenges. As an example, when Black people are more likely to live in neighborhoods with poor air quality, how can we expect a *respiratory* virus will impact us?

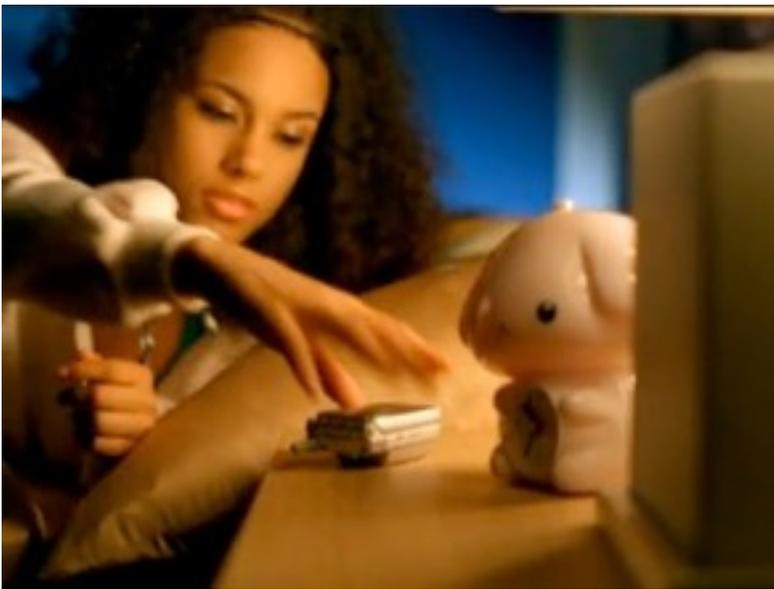
We learned that racism and racist policing doesn’t take a break, as Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, George Floyd, and Ahmaud Arbery (and so many others) were stolen from this lifetime. And in the midst of all these assaults, we still have people silencing Black righteous rage. There are still people who would want to stifle our cries for justice. In fact, they will say, “there’s just one human race.” This line is used to squash any prophetic and truthful statement. But even in this passage, we are held by the reminder that:

- Some people hate us for the faith we claim. They hate that our faith *strengthens* our identity.
- We are not weak for being worn by these assaults. We are human.
- God will answer our most vulnerable cries. We don’t have to be proper when we wail.

What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?

Connection to Today’s World

In 1982, Prince wrote and recorded a song called “How Come U Don’t Call Me Any-more?” Music critics note the song’s genius due to its gospel elements and masterful attention to Prince’s falsetto range. The song has been covered by Stephanie Mills and Alicia Keys.



Throughout the song, the singers ask--

*“Sometimes it feels like I'm gonna die
If you don't call me, papa
Oh, you got to try
I'll get down on my knees hoping you please

Won't you call me sometime, papa
Why don't you call me
Why on earth can't you just pick up the phone
You know I don't like to be alone”*

Though the song is written with the context of romantic relationships in mind, it is easily applicable to this Psalm. Sometimes, all you want is to be seen, to be valued, to be heard, to be considered human. You want your phone calls to be returned! Our rich musical legacy as Black people includes the spectrum of human emotions, just like the Psalms.

There's a psalm for every human emotion. There's also a Black groove for every situation. What are your favorite songs that speak to your emotions these days? Some artists to check out include Noname, Stevie Wonder, India.Arie, Lauryn Hill, Janelle Monae, Mahalia Jackson, Richard Smallwood, and Walter Hawkins.

Journal: Think about some of your favorite songs. Who gets you through tough seasons? Write down some of those lyrics below and return to them throughout the week as an affirmation.

Closing: Sing/watch “My Help (Psalm 121)”

For a video, click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWydssGbUBc>

*I will lift up mine eyes to the hills
From whence cometh my help
My help cometh from the Lord
The Lord which made Heaven and Earth*

*He said He would not suffer thy foot
Thy foot to be moved;*

*The Lord which keepeth thee
He will not slumber nor sleep*

*Oh the Lord is thy keeper
The Lord is thy shade
Upon thy right hand
Upon thy right hand*

*No, the sun shall not smite thee by day
Nor the moon by night
He shall preserve thy soul
Even forever more*

*My help, my help, my help
All of my help cometh from the Lord*

Prayer:

Dear God,

The world refuses to hear and acknowledge our pain. We organize public demonstrations, write articles and books, and offer general pleas for compassion, and still it often feels like no one hears or sees us. We are tired of feeling like our “mother’s children” simply gossip about us in the square. We are tired of being talked about but never engaged *with*. We are tired of being pandered to and insulted by empty gestures. We are tired of being lied to.

We await the Promise of Juneteenth. We pray that all your children would be set free.

We know that you will make your face visible to us. We know that you will pull back the veil that separates us from each other. When others intentionally malign our aims, we know that you hear and see us.

God, don’t hide your face from us. Don’t move slowly. Run to us as we run to you. May our embrace be sweet and nourishing.

In Jesus’ name,

Amen.