

Introduction: Many of you have faced situations that are painful or troubling and difficulties that just don't seem to go away. I believe there are times when life seems like a horse with the bit between its teeth – there's no changing or controlling it. That was where this Psalm writer found himself.

I. Let's look at what can happen when life runs amuck

- A. Emotions may also run amuck – and this can lead to an unhealthy focus on self (there are 18 first person singular pronouns in v.1-6!). In the psalmist's case, it seems it was self-pity – a pretty popular one!! By the way, let me point out a particular danger that many of you may have regarding your emotions – you know you shouldn't be ruled by them, you're bright enough that you can come up with a very rational-sounding defense of what you are saying/thinking/feeling, leaving you immune to correction when what you may really need to hear is Jesus' words from Matthew 8:26.
- B. The psalmist prayed, but that didn't seem to help – prayer seemed futile. (2-3)
- C. Verse 4 seems to blame God for sleeplessness (like drinking 2 liters of coke, having trouble sleeping, and blaming your spouse for having it in the house).
- D. And then – in verses 5-6 – there's the decision to look back at the good old days, not for the purpose of giving thanks or fueling faith, but with the end of strengthening melancholy and wistful longing.
- E. The end result of this approach to life's problems is found in verses 7-9 – serious doubt – which is the inevitable result when my focus is on me and my problems and my resources.

II. What might you do in response to such times?

- A. We may be tempted to use a variety of 'fixes'
 - 1. Deny the reality of the problem
 - 2. Vent at it
 - 3. Withdraw from others and responsibilities
 - 4. Depression
 - 5. Blame-shifting
 - 6. Become a control freak (Dan H's switchboard illus.)
 - 7. Anxiety or panic
 - 8. Live in fear and just accept that you're that way
 - 9. Rely on comfort food
- B. The writer shows us a better way (10-12)
 - The years of the right hand of the Most High. (10; cf. Exodus 15:6,11-12; and also Psalm 118:15b-16)
 - This leads to an ability to see the past in a different way (11-12 contrast with v.5)

- There is a shift to talk about (and to) God (20 times) in verses 13-20. And this is not just an academic theology of God. Rather, it is a delighting in His might, His glory, His majesty....because of what He DID!

III. Where does such an outlook as this take us?

- A. First of all, it takes us away from ourselves! We are no longer the first one we look at (Harry Grimes' illustration about group photos.)
- B. For you as New Testament believers, this outlook takes you, not primarily to Egypt and Moses, but to Christ. And that movement to Christ means more than just the hours of His crucifixion or the morning of His resurrection, as crucial as those are.

If we would join the writer in confessing God's redemption (v.13-15 and following), we also need to be taken with the beauty of Christ's life, to confess His power and authority, to meditate on His trust in and submission to the Father, to reflect on His interactions with followers and opponents, and to delight in His willingness to suffer injustice (and the justice of God) for our sakes, to the end that we are ashamed of our own little faith and regularly repent of our failure to die to self and walk in the newness of life which is ours in Jesus.

Conclusion – Let me close with another question and an answer: What is wrong in America today? (Lots of answers and many good things as well...) But here's the answer I ask you to consider: Too many of us who claim to be followers of Jesus are too much like the writer of Psalm 77 prior to v. 10 – caught up in our own feelings and desires and disappointments and not seeing enough of Jesus. May God give us grace to look to the years of the right hand of the Most High and to remember His wonders, and then to live accordingly.