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Scripture

Psalm 102

- ¹ Hear my prayer, O LORD;
let my cry come to you.
- ² Do not hide your face from me
in the day of my distress.
Incline your ear to me;
answer me speedily in the day when I call.
- ³ For my days pass away like smoke,
and my bones burn like a furnace.
- ⁴ My heart is stricken and withered like grass;
I am too wasted to eat my bread.
- ⁵ Because of my loud groaning
my bones cling to my skin.
- ⁶ I am like an owl of the wilderness,
like a little owl of the waste places.
- ⁷ I lie awake;
I am like a lonely bird on the housetop.
- ⁸ All day long my enemies taunt me;
those who deride me use my name for a curse.
- ⁹ For I eat ashes like bread,
and mingle tears with my drink,
- ¹⁰ because of your indignation and anger;
for you have lifted me up and thrown me aside.
- ¹¹ My days are like an evening shadow;
I wither away like grass.
- ¹² But you, O LORD, are enthroned forever;
your name endures to all generations.
- ¹³ You will rise up and have compassion on Zion,
for it is time to favor it;
the appointed time has come.
- ¹⁴ For your servants hold its stones dear,
and have pity on its dust.
- ¹⁵ The nations will fear the name of the LORD,
and all the kings of the earth your glory.
- ¹⁶ For the LORD will build up Zion;
he will appear in his glory.
- ¹⁷ He will regard the prayer of the destitute,
and will not despise their prayer.
- ¹⁸ Let this be recorded for a generation to come,
so that a people yet unborn may praise the LORD:
- ¹⁹ that he looked down from his holy height,
from heaven the LORD looked at the earth,

²⁰ to hear the groans of the prisoners,
to set free those who were doomed to die;
²¹ so that the name of the LORD may be declared in Zion,
and his praise in Jerusalem,
²² when peoples gather together,
and kingdoms, to worship the LORD.
²³ He has broken my strength in midcourse;
he has shortened my days.
²⁴ “O my God,” I say, “do not take me away
at the mid-point of my life,
you whose years endure
throughout all generations.”
²⁵ Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
²⁶ They will perish, but you endure;
they will all wear out like a garment.
You change them like clothing, and they pass away;
²⁷ but you are the same, and your years have no end.
²⁸ The children of your servants shall live secure;
their offspring shall be established in your presence.

Devotional

Advent is a time to anticipate the coming of God’s kingdom that we have seen already in Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is a time for reflection, for turning to God in prayer, to confess our sins and to petition God for the deepest needs of our hearts.

Given this description of Advent, Psalm 102 is a marvelous passage for the season. The heading of the psalm identifies the kind of person who might pray its words: “a prayer for one afflicted, when faint and pleading before the LORD.” Perhaps being “afflicted” is the main requirement for celebrating Advent. “Afflicted” translates the Hebrew term *ani*, which may also be rendered “poor” or “needy.” The Psalms suggest this description is a key self-identification of anyone who seeks God’s salvation (Psalm 40:17). But being “poor” or “needy” does not suggest we should be self-effacing or that we should deny the abilities God has given us. Rather, the expression of need is the first and necessary step in opening ourselves to God’s grace. Psalm 102 has been identified traditionally as a penitential psalm. Read this way, the psalm is particularly appropriate: our greatest sign of need, that which causes our spirits to wither (v. 4), is our sinful turning away from the God who loves us.

Prayer

O God, You “are enthroned forever, and your name endures to all generations.” But our days are “like an evening shadow.” Therefore, we lay before you our every weakness— the brevity of our lives are but signs of our failure to live as your people. We trust ourselves to you, O God, and we pray that by your grace we might live securely in your presence, now and forevermore. Amen.