

## WHITE NOISE

### "MAKING SENSE OF SILENCE IN SUFFERING"

#### PSALM 102:1-28

### This Week's Core Competency

**Personal God** – I believe that God is involved in and cares about my daily life. Psalm 121:1-2

- 1 *I lift up my eyes to the hills-  
where does my help come from?*  
2 *My help comes from the LORD,  
the Maker of heaven and earth.*

Psalm 102 informs a number of Core Competencies, which makes it difficult to focus what follows on any particular one. Prayer is probably the most obvious competency about which the psalm speaks. The psalm is truly "a prayer which others who are near the end of their endurance can echo" (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, TOTC, 393). Pleading that God would answer him "quickly" (v. 2), the psalmist laments that he is overwhelmed and in dire straits because of circumstances brought on by God's wrath (v. 10). But taking hope in the fact that his eternal, ever compassionate God will respond to the prayer of the destitute and rebuild Zion, he asks the LORD to extend his days. The psalm's superscription says it all: "A prayer of an afflicted man. When he is faint and pours out his lament before the LORD."

Psalm 102 informs our understanding of the Trinity as well. The Core Competency Trinity is not about the tri-unity of God alone. It encompasses all that the Bible teaches about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And Psalm 102 has much to say

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***My God, it is to you alone that I talk  
because nobody else will understand.***

– Thomas Merton

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about the LORD—most of which it teaches through the use of contrast. Three times the psalmist uses the expression "but you" to highlight that God is eternal. In verse 12 the psalmist says, "But you, O LORD, sit enthroned forever; your renown endures through all generations." In contrast to the psalmist, whose days are "like the evening shadow" and whose life withers away "like grass" (v. 5), the LORD lives forever. He will not only outlive the psalmist, he will outlive his own creation. In verse 26, speaking of the heavens and the earth, the psalmist says, "They will perish but you remain." And then he adds regarding them: "they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded." And then a third time, in verse 27 he says, "But you remain the same and your years will never end." The psalmist also teaches that the Lord shows "compassion" and "favor." He is righteous, for when the time comes to rebuild Zion, he does so (v. 13; cf., v. 16). Moreover, he responds to the prayer of destitute (v. 17), and although he is transcendent (simply put, God is separated from man and above man because God is holy and man is sinful; God is infinite and man is finite. God is "wholly other" than man) he looks down to hear "the groans of prisoners" and release those on death row (v. 20).

Finally, Psalm 102 informs our understanding of Personal God. God is involved in and cares about the daily lives of his people. Clearly the psalmist believes God is involved in and cares about his life. Otherwise, why would he bother to pray? And in the opening to his prayer, why would he appeal to God's compassionate side? He prays with anticipation knowing that God will be moved by his cry for help when he is in distress. Furthermore, he

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readily confesses that God broke his strength and cut short his days—perhaps in connection with judgment that God had brought on Zion (v. 10)—a clear indication of his involvement in the psalmist's life. It seems God is involved in the daily lives of his people for bad as well as good. One commentator writes: "Here the psalmist returned to his personal complaint. The Lord had weakened him (cf. vv. 4-10), seemingly about to cut his life . . . short (cf. vv. 3, 11). So he appealed for an extension of his life, asking that he not die prematurely: **Do not take me away . . . in the midst of my days.** Since God's **years go on** (v. 24; cf. v.27), speaking figuratively of His eternity, the writer wanted his own life to continue for at least a while longer" (Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 867).

According to the psalmist, God is transcendent; he writes: "The Lord looked down from his sanctuary on high; from heaven he viewed the earth" (v. 19; cf., v. 26). But he is also immanent; he adds: "to hear the groans of the prisoners and release those condemned to death" (v. 20). All of which makes it possible for his people to live in his *personal* presence, to be established before him.

## day **1** ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

### Psalm 102:1-28

A prayer of an afflicted man. When he is faint and pours out his lament before the LORD.

- 1 Hear my prayer, O LORD;  
let my cry for help come to you.
- 2 Do not hide your face from me  
when I am in distress.  
Turn your ear to me;  
when I call, answer me quickly.
- 3 For my days vanish like smoke;  
my bones burn like glowing embers.
- 4 My heart is blighted and withered like grass;  
I forget to eat my food.
- 5 Because of my loud groaning  
I am reduced to skin and bones.
- 6 I am like a desert owl,  
like an owl among the ruins.
- 7 I lie awake; I have become  
like a bird alone on a roof.
- 8 All day long my enemies taunt me;  
those who rail against me use my name as a  
curse.
- 9 For I eat ashes as my food  
and mingle my drink with tears
- 10 because of your great wrath,  
for you have taken me up and thrown me aside.
- 11 My days are like the evening shadow;  
I wither away like grass.
- 12 But you, O LORD, sit enthroned forever;  
your renown endures through all generations.
- 13 You will arise and have compassion on Zion,  
for it is time to show favor to her;  
the appointed time has come.
- 14 For her stones are dear to your servants;

- her very dust moves them to pity.
- 15 The nations will fear the name of the LORD,  
all the kings of the earth will revere your glory.
- 16 For the LORD will rebuild Zion  
and appear in his glory.
- 17 He will respond to the prayer of the destitute;  
he will not despise their plea.
- 18 Let this be written for a future generation,  
that a people not yet created may praise the LORD:
- 19 "The LORD looked down from his sanctuary on  
high,  
from heaven he viewed the earth,  
20 to hear the groans of the prisoners  
and release those condemned to death."
- 21 So the name of the LORD will be declared in Zion  
and his praise in Jerusalem
- 22 when the peoples and the kingdoms  
assemble to worship the LORD.
- 23 In the course of my life he broke my strength;  
he cut short my days.
- 24 So I said:  
"Do not take me away, O my God, in the midst of  
my days;  
your years go on through all generations.
- 25 In the beginning you laid the foundations of the  
earth,  
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
- 26 They will perish, but you remain;  
they will all wear out like a garment.  
Like clothing you will change them  
and they will be discarded.
- 27 But you remain the same,  
and your years will never end.
- 28 The children of your servants will live in your  
presence;  
their descendants will be established before you."

## EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- \* Underline words alluding to prayer throughout the psalm (see vv. 1, 2, 17, 20, 24).
- \* Box "like" indicating *comparison* in vv. 3-7, 26.
- \* Box "because" indicating *reason* in v. 10.
- \* Highlight "but you" indicating *contrast* in vv. 12, 26, 27.
- \* Circle "Zion" in vv. 13, 16, 21.
- \* Draw a line from the opening quotation marks in v. 19 to the closing quotation marks in v. 20.
- \* Draw an arrow from "this" in v. 18 to the opening quotation marks in v. 19.
- \* Box "so" indicating *result* in v. 21.
- \* Bracket the psalmist's request in v. 24.
- \* In the margin next to v. 23 write, "Cf. v. 10."

## day 2 EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. The psalmist describes his wretched state in *figurative* terms in verses 3-11. Which images suggest what about his physical state?
2. Which images suggest what about his emotional state?
3. Explain the *contrast* ("but you") introduced in verse 12.
4. Why will "a people not yet created" praise the LORD?
5. When will the name of the LORD and his praise be declared in Zion?
6. Do a little theology. What do verses 12-22 teach about the LORD?
7. Verse 23 seems to pick up where verse 11 left off. How so?
8. So what does the psalmist actually pray for?
9. Do a little more theology. Explain what the *contrasts* in verses 26 and 27 teach about the LORD.
10. **Discussion:** Talk about what you learned about prayer from this psalm.

**EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

The superscription of Psalm 102 calls it "the prayer of an afflicted man . . . his lament before the Lord." The psalm preserves the complaint of an unnamed individual that apparently resulted from his involvement in a national disaster—the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar (see 2Ch 36:15-19; cf. 2Ki 25:1-21; Jer 52:4-27). On the title of the psalm, the NIV Study Bible notes, "The title identifies only the life situation in which the prayer is to be used, and in accordance with vv. 1-11, 23-24 it designates the prayer as that of an individual. But vv. 12-22, 28 clearly indicate national involvement in the calamity. It may be that the distress suffered by the individual is the result of his sharing in a national disaster such as the exile—a suggestion supported by references to the restoration of Zion" (note **102 title**, 892).

Psalm 102 can be divided into three parts following the psalmist's opening appeal for God to answer him quickly. The first part (vv. 3-11) describes his wretched state. His distress is so great that it has affected both his body and soul. His life has gone up in smoke so to speak. Physically he's wasting away because he's too depressed to eat and as a result is nothing but skin and bones. Emotionally he's forlorn, alone among the ruins of the city and taunted by his enemies. They mention his name in their curses on others, saying, "May you become like . . . in his distress." Ashes of mourning and tears of sorrow have become his only food and drink. All of this because God in his wrath handed Jerusalem over to Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonians (2Ch 36:17).

One commentator describes the psalmist's situation this way: "The speaker is sleepless and his loneliness is compared to lonely birds (vv. 6-7). His emotions are made explicit by expressions of mourning (**ashes** and **tears**, which are also his **food** and **drink**, thus underlining his destitute and emaciated condition). Enveloping this whole section are reference to **my days**, which are about to pass into the night of death. As in most individual laments, there are **my enemies** who **taunt me**, but they are not this psalm's chief concern. They simply exacerbate an existing condition (note the logical connective for in v. 9), one that may ultimately be traced back to God: **because of your great wrath**. A literal translation brings out the notion that God's

treatment has a note of cruelty: 'you have picked me up and cast me away/down'" (Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, NIBC, 391).

The second part (vv. 12-22) describes the LORD's matchless compassion and mercy. The King eternal will have compassion on Zion. One writer explains: "The Lord had decreed seventy years for Babylon's hegemony, and thereafter it would fall. With the fall of Babylon, the 'time' ('the appointed time') of God's favor would begin the era of restoration . . . The new era is marked by forgiveness, renewal of the covenant, and the restoration of the people to the land. All this is in view when the psalmist hopes in the promises of the Lord" (Willem A. VanGemeren, "Psalms," in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 5: 752). And when the LORD has compassion on Zion, the kings of the earth will revere him (v. 15).

The LORD will also rebuild Zion in answer to the prayers of those made destitute; he will not despise their plea. And when he does, future generation after future generation will praise him in Jerusalem because he looked down to hear the groans of his people and deliver them from death. The exile did come to an end, and the LORD did rebuild Zion. However, the return of the exiles beginning in 538 B.C., followed by the completion of the temple in 515 and of the city walls in 445, did not mark the complete fulfillment of the psalmist's words. As the same writer observes: "And yet the new acts of God's compassion in the era of the postexilic restoration foreshadow a greater glory to come" (752).

The third part (vv. 23-28) returns to the psalmist's state. He asks that his life be extended, a request he then confidently anchors in God's eternity. In contrast to the creation destined to perish, the Creator forever remains the same. And because the LORD does not change, his people's future is secure. They will live in his presence. Commenting on the eloquence of verses 25-28, one expositor writes: "This is not only eloquence surpassing even that of Psalm 90: the range of thought leaves all our space-time landmarks for behind, yet diminishes nothing of the significance of the present. This significance derives from God, who is committed eternally to his servants and their posterity—and to nothing else in creation, not even the universe itself" (Kidner, 395). Believers today can "go to school" on this ancient prayer.

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## *The Message of the Passage*

*Cry out to the LORD when you're in dire straits knowing that your compassionate and eternal God will respond to your prayer in accord with his future purposes.*

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 "living questions" to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your answers to the following *living* questions:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

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# notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

## *Superscription*

While this psalm is "the prayer of an afflicted man," the man's personal affliction is tied to the affliction of the Zion community (cf. vv. 10, 13, 16, 20), which suggests that it may have been written during the exile sometime after the destruction of Jerusalem. "Ps 102 is an Individual Lament in which the troubles of the afflicted man are related to, and set against the background of, the destruction of Jerusalem and its hoped-for restoration" (A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms: Psalms 73-150*, NCBC, 704). "The references to the condition of Zion point to the period of the captivity as the time when the Psalm was composed. Although Rashi [a rabbinic commentator of the eleventh century] identifies the speaker with Israel, he is more probably an individual captive who details his wretched plight. But he pours out his soul as a member of the Israelite community and speaks for his people as well as himself" (A. Cohen, *The Psalms*, Soncino Books of the Bible, 328).

### v. 1 **Hear**

"Asking to be heard is not [necessarily] the outgrowth of expecting not to be heard but rather an effective way of recalling that God is ready to hear. The five separate petitions are practically the same request. They reflect nothing more than an attempt to acquire certainty about being heard. The fact that some doubts may have assailed the writer is also quite likely" (H. C. Leupold, *The Psalms*, 708).

### v. 3 **like**

The imagery, although vague, suggests the psalmist's life, i.e., "his days," is wasting away; we might say his life is "going up in smoke." His body, i.e., "bones," is nearly consumed like the dying embers of a fire.

### v. 4 **forget**

He doesn't feel like eating; he is so sick at heart.

### v. 5 **because**

"Anxiety (which causes the psalmist to groan) keeps him from eating (v. 4). This physical deprivation in turn makes him emaciated—he is turned to 'skin and bones,' so to speak" (the NET Bible, 10<sup>tn</sup> on v. 5).

### v. 6 **like**

Again the imagery is a bit vague. Nevertheless, the owl, associated with the desert and ruins in other texts (Isa 34:11, 15; Jer 50:39; Zep 2:14), is a most appropriate simile if the psalm was written against the backdrop of the destruction of Jerusalem.

### v. 7 **alone**

The language conveys a sense of desolation and loneliness. The psalmist imagines himself alone among the ruins of the city.

### v. 8 **curse**

As in "may you become like that man in his distress." "This may have involved the use of some such formula as that found in Gen. 48:20: 'God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh', except that the enemies would use this or a similar expression of the purposes of cursing, and not in blessing" (Anderson, 707). "When the psalmist's enemies call judgment down on others, they hold the psalmist up as a prime example of what they desire their enemies to become" (the NET Bible, 15<sup>tn</sup> on v. 8).

### v. 9 **ashes**

Mourners would sometimes put ashes on their head or roll in ashes as a sign of mourning (see 2Sam 13:19; Job 2:8; Isa 58:5). Ashes and tears were the psalmist's food and drink. "Mourning and weeping (tears; cf. Ps. 80:5) were so continuous that they were like his daily diet" (Ross, 866).

### v. 10 **because**

The psalmist's wretched state was due to the wrath of God (cf. 2Ch 36:15-19).

### v. 11 **like**

The evening shadow indicated the day was almost gone, so the psalmist felt his life was almost over.

### v. 12 **arise . . . compassion**

"His conviction in Zion's glorious future remains unshaken, and is re-enforced by meditating upon God's eternity. 'Zion cannot die while Zion's God lives' (M.)" (Cohen, 330). The verse anticipates the exiles return to Judah and the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls and its temple (cf. v. 16).

### v. 17 **the destitute**

A reference to others like the psalmist impoverished by God's judgment. "The destitute here are clearly God's people of the exilic period, while Jerusalem lies in ruins (v. 14) and is in need of rebuilding (v. 16)" (Broyles, 390).

### v. 19 **looked . . . hear**

The LORD "looked down to hear." The language suggests that God pays attention to his people and answers their prayers. "The omniscient God's taking a close look at His people is mentioned often in the psalms; it shows His great concern. The Lord sometimes intervened to deliver those about to die" (Ross, 867).

### v. 23 **broke . . . cut short**

The psalmist returns to his personal lament in verses 3-11 and asks God to extend his life a little longer.

### vv. 25-27 **you**

"Verses 25-27 are applied to Christ in Hebrews 1:10-12. The psalmist was addressing the eternal Lord, and the writer of Hebrews identified Jesus Christ as the eternal One, the Creator and Sustainer of the world. This is a strong affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ" (Ross, 867).

## Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Psalm 102 is written by an afflicted man who is faint and pours out his lament to the Lord. His affliction is unknown to us but the emotions he communicates are familiar. Because you and I live in this fallen world, we experience loss, pain and suffering. Unfortunately, no one is immune to this and occasionally our kids will grieve as well. As parents it's important for us to understand the grieving process and know how to help our kids when seasons of trouble come. In 1969, psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross introduced what became known as the "five stages of grief," which represent feelings of those who have faced death or tragedy. Based on her years of working with cancer patients, Kubler-Ross proposed the following pattern of phases many people experience: (1) Denial: "This can't be happening to me." (2) Anger: "Why is this happening? Who is to blame?" (3) Bargaining: "Make this not happen, and in return I will \_\_\_\_." (4) Depression: "I'm too sad to do anything." (5) Acceptance: "I'm at peace with what has happened." It's important to allow children to talk about the situation that is making them sad. Be sure to remind kids that God is sovereign, He is in control and loves us more than we can possibly imagine. Because of our great God we will be able to say He "has turned our mourning into gladness!" (Jer. 31:13)

### What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Psalm 102

1. How is the Psalmist feeling?
2. What does he say the Lord will do in verse 13?
3. According to verse 18, why did he write this Psalm?

### What Do You Think

Can you think of a time when you were really sad about something? How does it help to know that God knows and cares about everything in our life?

### What R U Going To Do

Do you know someone who is having a hard time right now? Is there someone who is sick or has recently moved here and misses his friends? Pray for that person and send them a card this week!

## MEMORY TIME

Core Comp

Personal God - I believe God cares about everything in my life.

Memory Verse

Hebrews 1:2 - *But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.*

## KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC \_\_\_\_ and Verse \_\_\_\_\_. Family completed **Say** \_\_\_\_\_ **Think** \_\_\_\_\_ **Do** \_\_\_\_\_

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_ Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.  
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

# 30 CORE COMPETENCIES

## 10 CORE BELIEFS

### **Trinity** 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **Salvation By Grace** Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Authority of the Bible** 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

### **Personal God** Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

### **Identity in Christ** John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

### **Church** Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

### **Humanity** John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

### **Compassion** Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

### **Eternity** John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

### **Stewardship** 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

## 10 CORE PRACTICES

### **Worship** Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

### **Prayer** Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Bible Study** Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Single-mindedness** Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

### **Spiritual Gifts** Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

### **Biblical Community** Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

### **Giving Away My Time** Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Money**

#### 2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Faith** Ephesians

#### 6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Life** Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

## 10 CORE VIRTUES

### **Joy** John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

### **Peace** Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

### **Faithfulness** Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

### **Self-Control** Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

### **Humility** Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

### **Love** 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

### **Patience** Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

### **Kindness/Goodness** 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

### **Gentleness** Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

### **Hope** Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

## About the Authors

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**Wendy Hollabaugh** (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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