

Main Idea: Psalm 44 shows us what to do when life doesn't make sense. In Psalm 44, the psalmist expresses three things to God. Let's look at them and then make application.

- I. Here's what he knew (1-8).
 - A. The Lord helped His people in the past (1-3).
 - B. If He chooses, the Lord can help us in the present (4-8).
- II. Here's how he felt (9-22).
 - A. He shares his feelings about God (9-16).
 1. You've rejected us (9-12).
 2. You've made us a reproach in the eyes of people (13-16).
 - B. He shares his feelings about his innocence (17-22).
- III. Here's how he responded (23-26).
 - A. He asked.
 - B. He affirmed.

Application: When life doesn't make sense...

1. Remember what God did in the past (1-3).
2. Admit your inadequacy and God's sufficiency (6-8).
3. Turn to the Lord, not away from Him (9-16).
4. Check for sin in your life (17-19).
5. Realize we're living in enemy territory (22).
6. Affirm God's love no matter how you feel (26).
7. Take heart knowing you are in good company.

I want to talk to you about your feelings tonight. Particularly I have in mind the kind of feelings that stir up within when life doesn't make sense. Like feelings of disappointment and confusion and discouragement and sadness.

What do you do with those kind of feelings? I'm not talking about when you're sinned either. Those kinds of feelings are often wake up signals from God. I'm talking about when you're seeking to live for Christ, yet difficult things enter your life, and you begin to feel the weight of feelings of frustration and even despair.

Have you noticed that putting Christ first doesn't put a pain-proof-bubble over us?

Quite frankly, there are times and situations when life doesn't make sense. Drunk drivers swerve left of center and hit cars driven by God-fearing Christians. A Christian man or woman puts in thirty years with a company only to hear the ever-too-familiar words, "Please clean out your desk at the end of the day."

You well know that life is full of uncertainty and potential heartache. Oh, we know that God is in control. And we know that He works all things together for our good and His glory.

But the hard question is this. How are we supposed to respond *when life doesn't make sense*? God answers that question for us in His Word. There are several places in the Bible to which we could turn for guidance--such as Romans 8:28, Philippians 1, 2 Corinthians 12, or the story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50.

But we're going to turn to a psalm--Psalm 44. It's probably not a familiar psalm to you. Did you realize that the Spirit of God recorded several psalms specifically designed to help the people of God work through times of tragedy? One such example is the forty-fourth psalm.

Psalm 44 is what commentator Claus Westermann calls a "communal psalm of lament." Some other examples are Psalm 74, 79, 80, and 89. Another communal psalm of lament would be the book of Lamentations.

In a communal psalm of lament, the psalmist cries out to God. He "laments" because a crisis is at hand. But he's not alone in the crisis. It's a national crisis, hence, it's a *communal* psalm of lament. The psalmist speaks for the community, even for the nation. Indeed, he leads the entire assembly in calling out to God.

Have you ever hurt so badly you didn't know what to say? When you tried to talk to God, words failed you. God gave us psalms like Psalm 44 to help us in times like that.

As you scan through Psalm 44, you'll notice the pronouns fluctuate between the first person plural ("we, us") and the first person singular ("I, my, me"). For instance, in verses 1-3 it's "we" and "us." Then in verse 4 it's "my." In verse 5 it's "we" again." In verse 6, it returns to "I" and "my." Then it's "we" and "us" down through verse 15 when it returns to the first person singular "my" and "me."

That may merely be a literary device. On the other hand it may indicate that more than one person spoke when this psalm was used in Israel's public worship. In effect, it was like a responsive reading. Peter Craigie suggests (331), "The king, who was commander-in-chief of the armed forces, speaks in the first person singular; the people (whether the army or a national congregation) speak the words in the plural."

When would the Israelites have used Psalm 44 in public worship? We're not told the setting. The language of the psalm indicates they've experienced some kind of national disaster. Quite likely, they just lost a major battle to an enemy. They'd been forced to retreat (10). Prisoners were taken and sold into slavery (12). The army was decimated in a massive slaughter (22).

So this was the song the defeated army or nation sang to God right after the battle loss. In a sense, it's just the opposite of a victory hymn like Judges 5. Judges 5 records the song Deborah and Barak sang right after God delivered Israel from the Canaanites in battle. Judges 5 was a victory song. Psalm 44 was anything but a victory song.

So how do you make sense of life right after you've lost a major battle? What should you think? And what can you say, especially to God?

Psalm 44 shows us what to do when life doesn't make sense. In Psalm 44, the psalmist expresses three things to God. Let's look at them. And then, we'll go back through the psalm a second time and make application by identifying seven personal responsibilities in times when life doesn't make sense.

I. Here's what he knew (1-8).

The psalm begins on a positive note in the first eight verses. According to the heading, this psalm was "for the director of music" in Israel. We don't know who penned the lyrics--the introduction attributes it to "the Sons of Korah" (they also are mentioned in the headings of Psalms 42-49, 84, 85, 87, and 88).

Who were the sons of Korah? They were a Levitical choir made up of the descendants of Korah appointed by David to serve in Israel's public worship.

Israel had several choirs. Asaph led the choir of the Gershonites; Jeduthun (Ethan) led the choir of the Mararites (1 Chr 6:31-47). And apparently, according to the heading over Psalm 88, Heman led the choir known as the sons of Korah--at least in David's day (but we don't know when Psalm 44 was penned).^[2]

A sidelight: Please notice that God has given music an important place in His worship. He wants us to sing to Him. According to Ephesians 5:18-20, Christ-honoring singing is one evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives. If praising God in song is important to God, it ought to be important to us. That's one reason why we ought to make church a priority on our schedule--so we can gather and give to God what He desires and deserves--not just solos, but corporate praise.

The "sons of Korah" penned this "maskil" (a musical or literary term) to help the Israelite congregation in their worship. The worship leader begins by affirming what he and his people knew about the Lord--two truths.

A. The Lord helped His people in the past (1-3). "We have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago. With your hand you drove out the nations and planted our fathers; you crushed the peoples and made our fathers flourish. It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you loved them."

The psalmist praised God for past victories. "We've heard, Lord, what You did in the past!" By the way, where had they learned? Verse 1 says, "Our fathers have told us." Whose job is it to make sure successive generations learn about what God has done? God holds *fathers* responsible (check out Deut 6:7). Spurgeon put it this way (299), "When fathers are tongue-tied religiously with their offspring, need they wonder if their children's hearts remain sinned?"

According to verse 1, what had their fathers told them? What *God* did in their days. Notice the exploits weren't their fathers. They were God's. And what had God done? First, He drove out the enemy nations, and then He planted His people in the promised land (2).

Please realize it wasn't because the Israelites were expert warriors that they took the Promised Land. They weren't. Remember how they conquered Jericho? By marching around the city for six days, then seven times on the seventh day, then the priests blew trumpets and the people shouted, and boom! God knocked the walls down!

God did that--not the people. And why did He do it? Because of merit? No. He did it because of grace--He loved His people. That's what the psalmist knew--the Lord helped His people in the past. A second truth...

B. If He chooses, the Lord can help us in the present (4-8). "You are my King and my God, who decrees victories for Jacob. Through you we push back our enemies; through your name we trample our foes. I do not trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory; but you give us victory over our enemies, you put our adversaries to shame. In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name forever. Selah."

The psalmist knew this about God. God doesn't change. What He did for our ancestors who took the Promised Land, He can do for us if He so chooses. And sometimes He does. Sometimes He displays His amazing power, and as verse 5 puts it, "we push back our enemies" and "trample our foes." Sometimes He gives us "victory over our enemies" and puts "our enemies to shame (7)."

And when He does, we praise His name (8).

But what about when He doesn't? Are there ever times when He allows our enemies to push us back and trample on us? Indeed, there are. It was right after such a time that Psalm 44 was composed.

You'll notice a drastic change in tone as you enter the second movement of the psalm beginning in verse 9. In verses 1-8 the psalmist tells us what he knew. Starting in verse 9 he depicts how he felt.

II. Here's how he felt (9-22).

Do you know when it's hardest to live the Christian life? It's when what you *know* doesn't square with how you *feel*. The psalmist knew good theology. That wasn't the problem. He knew that the Lord had helped His people in the past. And he knew that if God would so choose, He could help us in the present. That's what he knew.

But... that wasn't how he felt. Not at this time. He felt like he and the rest of God's people had just taken it on the chin--and he didn't understand why. Ever been there?

Let's listen in as the psalmist shares his feelings about two matters. First...

A. He shares his feelings about God (9-16). As you glance through verses 9-16, you'll see the pronoun "You" over and over again. "You" refers to God. Listen to how he felt about God:

Verses 9-12, "But now you have rejected and humbled us; you no longer go out with our armies. You made us retreat before the enemy, and our adversaries have plundered us. You gave us up to be devoured like sheep and have scattered us among the nations. You sold your people for a pittance, gaining nothing from their sale."

He continues in verses 13-16, "You have made us a reproach to our neighbors, the scorn and derision of those around us. You have made us a byword among the nations; the peoples shake their heads at us. My disgrace is before me all day long, and my face is covered with shame at the taunts of those who reproach and revile me, because of the enemy, who is bent on revenge."

In essence, the psalmist says two things to God. First...

1. *You've rejected us (9-12).* And second...

2. *You've made us a reproach in the eyes of people (13-16).* The psalmist used at least ten verbs to depict what the Lord had done to His people. In staccato like fashion, he identifies God as the subject of a series of serious actions: God, You rejected us. You humbled us. You made us retreat. You gave us up to be devoured. You scattered us. You sold your people. You made us a reproach. You made us a byword among the nations.

Frankly, you may be uncomfortable with this, but it's the biblical truth. There's nothing that can happen to you apart from the sovereign control of God. Nothing. In fact, will you notice that the psalmist doesn't attribute the horrible things that have happened to him to fate or chance or even the devil, but to the Lord? "You did it, Lord," he says.

It's true that God doesn't *cause* tragedy, but know this. He is in control of it. Centuries ago Augustine said, "Nothing, therefore, happens unless the Omnipotent wills it to happen; he either permits it to happen, or he brings it about himself." In his excellent book, *Trusting God*, Jerry Bridges reminds us (28), "Nothing is too large or small to escape God's governing hand. The spider building its web in the corner and Napoleon marching his army across Europe are both under God's control.

The psalmist knew that. He knew that God was sovereign and in absolute control. He knew that what had just happen was the work of God.

The question is *when*. When did it happen? When did God reject the Israelites and allow them to be conquered by hostile enemies? It happened many times, didn't it? The book of Judges records the roller-coaster ride of the fickle Israelites. After they settled down in the Promised Land, the people forgot God. So God disciplined them by permitting the surrounding pagan nations to dominate them. Until they repented and turned back to Him--then He rescued them by sending a "judge" or deliverer. And they remained faithful to God until the judge died, and then they turned away from God again. And God chastened them again. It happened over and over. The Israelites disobeyed God, and God allowed enemies to conquer them.

But that's not the case in Psalm 44--at least not from the perspective of the psalmist. This tragedy didn't occur in a time of waywardness. From the psalmist's perspective, it came during a time of innocence. As far as he could tell, his people hadn't abandoned God or violated His covenant.

So after sharing his feelings about God in verses 9-16, he proceeds to...

B. He shares his feelings about his innocence (17-22). "All this happened to us, though we had not forgotten you or been false to your covenant. Our hearts had not turned back; our feet had not strayed from your path. But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals and covered us over with deep darkness."

"If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god, would not God have discovered it, since he knows the secrets of the heart? Yet for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

Who does verse 17 sound like--"All this happened to us, though we had not forgotten you or been false to your covenant."? Can you think of another man of God who suffered, whose friends said the cause of the suffering was his sin, and who responded, "But I haven't done anything wrong!"? That's how Job felt. His visitors said, "Job, there must be sin in your life that you're hiding." But they were wrong. Job was righteous.

But what about the psalmist? Is he overstating the case of his innocence--we're prone to do that, aren't we? Or is he giving a valid assessment? Is it true that he and his people have been trying to live for God, and though not perfect, are innocent? Is it possible that this suffering is not something they brought on themselves by violating God's Word?

That's a tough question to answer, but there certainly were occasions in Israel's history when God allowed godly kings and their people to suffer defeat.

Remember Hezekiah? According to 2 Chronicles 29:2 "he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done." Hezekiah was a godly man and a God-fearing king. But listen to 2 Chronicles 32:1, "After all that Hezekiah had so faithfully done, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah. He laid siege to the fortified cities." In fact, Hezekiah watched as his entire country was destroyed by the Assyrian army, and only the capital city of Jerusalem survived.

Then there was Josiah. He, too, honored God and brought great reform to Judah (2 Chr 34). But he met an untimely death before his fortieth birthday, killed in battle by the Egyptians.

Apparently, Psalm 44 came at a time like that--a time when the nation was faithful to God--like under Hezekiah or Josiah--yet suffered great loss.

And the people were more than defeated. They were demoralized (Kidner, 169). Disaster is one thing, but disgrace is even worse. Which brings us to the third movement. Having heard what the psalmist knew, and how he felt...

III. Here's how he responded (23-26).

"Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression? We are brought down to the dust; our bodies cling to the ground. Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love."

Overwhelmed by feelings of despair, the psalmist responded by doing two things.

A. He asked. He asked God to take action. You'll notice six imperatives tucked around two questions in verses 23-26.

The imperatives--"Awake! Rouse yourself! Do not reject us. Rise up. Help us. Redeem us."

The questions--"Why do you sleep?" And "Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?"

In desperation the psalmist called on God and asked Him to intervene. He asked and...

B. He affirmed. Listen again to how the psalm ends, "Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love."

That's it? The psalm ends and leaves us hanging. Or does it? No. Rather than *hanging* the psalmist *hangs on* to the *chesed* (that's the final Hebrew word) of God. He affirms the character of God with these five concluding words: "because of Your unfailing love."

We'll come back to that thought in a moment. But first, please ponder, as mentioned earlier, that Psalm 44 has the flavor of the book of Job. Yet there's a difference, isn't there? After Job's crisis he could say (Job 42:5), "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you." By the end of the story Job felt a sense of closure.

But not the psalmist. In Psalm 44:2, he like Job can say, "We have heard with our ears." But there follows no vision of God. The psalm ends merely with a cry for help.

There are no pat answers in this psalm. There's simply tragedy, a prayer, and silence.

What's the point of this psalm? Why did God see fit to inspire its writing and include it in the pages of Scripture? For the benefit of the Israelites--yes, to help them know how to respond to national tragedy.

But what about us? Is there anything in Psalm 44 for us? I believe there is. 2 Timothy 3:16 says that all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable. I think Psalm 44 gives us insight into how to respond during times when life doesn't make sense. I see at least seven personal responsibilities modeled here.

Application: When life doesn't make sense...

1. *Remember what God did in the past (1-3).* That's how the psalmist begins, doesn't he? "We have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what you did in their days." Knowing what God did in the past can help sustain us in the present, right? It reminds us we're not the first people to face problems.

Paul put it this way in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

So when life doesn't make sense, remember what God did in the past. Remember what he did for Abraham, Moses, David, and Paul. And remember what He's done in your life in the past, too. Do you remember the day He saved your soul? Remember, then...

2. *Admit your inadequacy and God's sufficiency (6-8).* In verse 6 the psalmist declares, "I do not trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory." What's he saying? By myself, I don't have what it takes, so I'm not going to take matters into my own hand. I'm inadequate, Lord, but You are totally sufficient! Victory comes from you (7). So I'm going to boast in You, Lord (8).

When life doesn't make sense, that's the perfect time to admit your inadequacy and God's complete sufficiency. A third responsibility...

3. *Turn to the Lord, not away from Him (9-16).* You know, sometimes the glories of the past mock us. After remembering what God did in the past, and admitting our inadequacy and God's sufficiency, we might think, "Well, if God was really pleased with me, He'd rescue me from this jam, like He did for Abraham, Moses, David, and Paul."

Hold on. Let's get our facts straight. God doesn't always keep us *from* trials. Sometimes He takes us right *through* trials, right? Don't forget Abraham's Moriah experience, and Moses' forty years on the back side of the desert, and David's near death experiences in En Gedi, and Paul's repeated brushes with death.

But what made these men great men of God was this. They did what the psalmist did. In their times of crisis, they turned *to* the Lord, not *away* from Him. Over and over in verses 9-16, the psalmist looks directly to the Lord. Do you see?

Beloved, there is immense mystery with God and His ways. Simply put, He won't fit in our little box. His ways are higher than our ways. Moses put it this way in Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law."

What are we to do when we can't grasp what God's up to? Follow the example of the psalmist and keep praying. As Peter Craigie observes, "At the rational level, it would seem rather futile to pray and to seek God's love, when the immediate experience suggested that God could not be relied on. Yet the prayer is rooted in a faith deeper than reason." In other words, when life doesn't make sense, turn to the Lord, not away from Him. Fourthly, when life doesn't make sense...

4. *Check for sin in your life (17-19).* In verse 17, the psalmist could say, "All this happened to us, though we had not forgotten you or been false to your covenant." But there are times when adversity is the direct result of sin in our lives, isn't that true?

Listen to Galatians 6:7-8, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction." What's that saying? Destruction can be the result of what? Sin.

If you're facing hard times, take inventory. Is there unconfessed sin in your life? Is God trying to get your attention? Beloved, look to the Cross. There's cleansing available. At Calvary, Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sins so we can be forgiven. Then He rose again and offers new life to all who will repent and believe in Him.

5. *Realize we're living in enemy territory (22).* Verse 22 is a key verse, "Yet for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." Why do we face death? The psalmist says it's for *Your* sake. It's because we belong to God.

Ponder a statement by Old Testament commentator, Derek Kidner (170), "Suffering may be a battle-scar rather than a punishment; the price of loyalty in a world which is at war with God."

Several years ago I spent some time with a pastor from North Carolina. Dave pastored a small congregation in a town of under 1,000. Prior to that he pastored a larger church in the same town. He discovered one of the church members was living in flagrant sin, so he approach his deacons to initiate church discipline. Then he discovered that the man was a member of the Lodge. And several of the deacons were members of the Lodge. And they're response was, "We agree that this man is in sin, and that the Bible says he must be disciplined, but he's our Lodge brother and we won't do that to him."

The deacons voted against doing what God's Word required. Dave even received threats if he continued to force the issue. In the end Dave lost his position as pastor simply because he was committed to the authority of the Bible.

And the question is, why didn't God do something? Why does God allow His people to suffer unjust abuse and ridicule? There's no easy answer to that question. But in part, it's because we're living in enemy territory.

It's significant that verse 22 is similar to Isaiah 53:7 which predicts the unjust suffering of the Messiah as a sacrificial lamb. What's more, Paul quotes verse 22 in Romans 8:36 and applies it to Christians (see Romans 8:35-36). We ought not be surprised when we suffer. Jesus did. We will too. It's part of living in enemy territory.

But remember this. We're on the winning side! In the very next verse (Rom. 8:37) Paul affirms, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

6. *Affirm God's love no matter how you feel (26)*. There are times when we won't *feel* God's love, but we can affirm it. Think about it. If God would give up His Son for us, doesn't that prove that He loves us? God always has our good and His glory in mind. Always. And when life doesn't make sense, we must affirm that truth (see also Exodus 34:6-7; Romans 8:36-39). Finally, when life doesn't make sense...

7. *Take heart knowing you are in good company*. God wouldn't give us a psalm like Psalm 44 if we weren't going to need it, would He? But He gave it to us so we'd be ready, so we'd trust Him.

******Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[\[1\]](#) Adapted from a sermon preached at WBC on 7/11/99.

[\[2\]](#) See the *NIV Study Bible*, footnote on Psalm 42, p. 821.