

Psalm 80 — A Cry for Restoration and Revival

A Psalm of Asaph, set to “The Lilies.” A Testimony. For the Chief Musician.

Overview

Psalm 80 is a national prayer of repentance and restoration. It looks back at God's past care and laments His current silence and judgment. The people of Israel, once described as a flourishing vine, now face devastation and mockery. Yet through the sorrow runs a repeated refrain of hope: *“Restore us, O God; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved.”*

This is not just a historical psalm—it is a personal and communal call to return to God and ask Him to once again shine His presence upon His people.

Verses 1–3: Shepherd, Shine Your Face Upon Us

“Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth!” (v. 1)

The prayer begins by addressing God as Shepherd—the One who gently leads His people. It also acknowledges His majesty: He sits enthroned above the cherubim, the heavenly beings that surround His glory.

The psalmist asks for divine intervention:

“Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, stir up Your strength, And come and save us!” (v. 2)
“Restore us, O God; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!” (v. 3)

Personal Application:

In times of spiritual dryness or difficulty, this is where we begin: by remembering who God is. He is both Shepherd and Sovereign—close and powerful. Ask Him to stir up His strength and let His face shine upon you. Revival always begins with seeking God's presence, not merely His power.

Verses 4–7: A People in Pain

“O Lord God of hosts, How long will You be angry Against the prayer of Your people?” (v. 4)

The people had prayed, but God had not responded. Instead, He gave them “the bread of tears” and “tears to drink in great measure” (v. 5). Their neighbors mocked them; they were defeated and dishonored.

Again, the cry for restoration is repeated:

“Restore us, O God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!” (v. 7)

Reflection:

This isn't about divine abandonment in the Calvinist sense, nor is it about human initiative securing divine favor in the Arminian sense. Rather, the psalm shows that when a people stray, God withholds

His blessing—but He stands ready to restore when they humbly return. The initiative belongs to God, but the invitation to seek Him is always open.

Verses 8–13: The Withered Vine

The imagery shifts to a vine—symbolizing Israel:

“You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it.” (v. 8)

“It took deep root and filled the land.” (v. 9)

God had cultivated this vine, removed obstacles, and allowed it to flourish. But now:

“Why have You broken down her hedges, So that all who pass by the way pluck her fruit?” (v. 12)

The people were once secure, fruitful, and protected. But through disobedience, they forfeited God's hedge of protection. Wild beasts now ravage what was once flourishing.

Personal Application:

Has God's hand of protection felt distant in your life? When we compromise or neglect our relationship with Him, the “hedges” of spiritual vitality weaken. Restoration doesn't begin with fixing circumstances—it begins with returning to the God who planted you and longs to make you fruitful again.

Verses 14–19: Restore Us, Revive Us, Save Us

“Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts; Look down from heaven and see, And visit this vine.” (v. 14)

They plead with God not to forget what He Himself planted. Even though they had failed, they appeal to His covenantal care:

“Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, Upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself.” (v. 17)

Some scholars see this as a reference to the king, possibly even as a Messianic foreshadowing of Christ—the true Son of Man, the chosen Servant of God.

“Then we will not turn back from You; Revive us, and we will call upon Your name.” (v. 18)

And once more, the final refrain rises:

“Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!” (v. 19)

Personal Application:

Revival isn't something we manufacture. It is the result of God's face shining upon a humble and repentant heart. The phrase “restore us” is repeated three times in this psalm—it's the cry of people who recognize they've drifted, but who also trust that God hasn't changed. He is still faithful. Still good. Still the Shepherd of His people.

Closing Reflection

Psalm 80 shows us that even in times of spiritual decline, when the walls have fallen and fruitfulness is gone, God's people can call out for restoration—and He hears. This is not about merit. It's about mercy.

The psalm offers no theological formulas. It doesn't emphasize human will or divine election—it centers on relationship: *a Shepherd and His flock, a Vinedresser and His vineyard, a Father and His people.*

Have you drifted? Ask God to stir up His strength and shine His face upon you.

Do you feel withered or broken? Ask the Vinedresser to visit and revive what's been scorched.

Have you stopped praying because you think He isn't listening? Remember, He restores those who return.

Prayer

Lord, we are Your people. You planted us, nourished us, and watched over us. But we confess that we have turned aside. Restore us, O Shepherd of Israel. Cause Your face to shine on us again. Visit this vine. Revive what has withered. Not because we are worthy, but for the glory of Your name. In Jesus' name, Amen.