

## God our Rewarder part 1

Today I want to speak to you about something every believer encounters at some point in their walk with God — the tension between what we believe about God and who He is, and what we are actually experiencing in real life. Many of us, especially in our African context, have been shaped by extremes of the prosperity gospel or have come from cultures where expressing pain, confusion, or raw emotion feels uncomfortable or even taboo. Because of this, when life becomes difficult, when prayers seem unanswered, or when God feels silent or distant, we don't always know how to process it. We can feel alone, confused, disappointed, or even frustrated — unsure of how to express what's really happening inside us and how to process who God is, experientially.

The Prosperity Gospel (PG) teaches that:

- *God desires both spiritual and material well-being for all believers,*
- presenting this as a way of claiming ***Christ's triumph over sin, disease, curses, poverty, and life's challenges.***

This teaching portrays:

- health, wealth and material success as **evidence** of divine favour and covenantal blessing.
- Jesus' declaration in John 10:10 that He has come to give **abundant life** is foundational in this teaching, along with Old Testament (OT) scriptures regarding **covenantal blessings**.
- The declaration in 2 Corinthians 8:9 regarding **Jesus becoming poor** “so that by his poverty you may be rich” is taken literally,
- and often the principle in 2 Corinthians 9:6 regarding **sowing and reaping** is included, viewed as a **catalyst for material harvest and divine blessing**.
- The PG teaches that believers can access healing, wealth and success through **faith and positive confession**, with prosperity being viewed as **proof of faith and righteousness**.

The PG teaching however,

- is selective in its biblical texts, drawing heavily from those which speak of  **blessing, health, prosperity and success,**
- whilst being **unable to adequately address themes of contentment, suffering, persecution, trials and martyrdom.**
- Moreover, by implication, it often suggests **lack of faith** as an explanation for persistent sickness, suffering or poverty.
- It also tends to rely on eisegesis as opposed to faithful exegesis.
- Another challenge of this teaching is that it encourages Christians to relate to God in a transactional manner, where blessings are expected in **exchange for religious acts** as opposed to **genuine relationship** being sought.
- The excesses of this thinking can produce a **self-centred materialism,** focused more on **personal material and physical well-being** than **spiritual transformation.**

## **God's goal is spiritual transformation**

*Romans 8:29 (NKJV)*

*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

*2 Corinthians 3:18 (AMP)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, continually seeing as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are progressively being transformed into His image from [one degree of] glory to [even more] glory, which comes from the Lord, [who is] the Spirit.*

In reality, many of us walk through long seasons of difficulty, or challenge, where God feels silent, where our bodies don't heal, where our families don't shift, where our prayers feel unanswered.

And that is what I want to talk about in my next 2 messages. God is a rewarder. God does reward. But more often than not, there is a process and journey of continuing to do good despite the apparent lack of fruit or answer to prayer. We need to be encouraged to keep doing good, stay in faith, knowing that we will reap, knowing that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Today I will speak to the process

or journey in the trial and next time I will teach around what God rewards and what disqualifies us from those rewards.

**Galatians 6:9 (NKJV)**

*And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*

**Hebrews 10:36 (NKJV)**

*For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise...*

**Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV)**

*6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

God is not the God of instant results or quick fixes — but He is the God who sees, remembers, and rewards those who seek Him, often in ways that aren't visible immediately.

My prayer is that as we talk through this message, you will be encouraged to keep going, and reminded that God is not unjust to forget your work. He sees. He knows. He remembers. And He will reward.

## **Lament Psalms**

I am currently studying theology through SATS and one of the courses I did last year was on the psalms. Did you realise that:

- **one third of the psalms are lament psalms?**
- **they are by far the most common type of psalm in the Psalter,**  
especially the first half, e.g. Psalms 3–7; 22; 25–28; 51; 54–57; 139–143<sup>1</sup>.

**A lament is a psalm that typically has 5 components.** It often begins with

**1. an invocation or cry to God,**

*Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. (Ps 69:1NKJV)*

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<sup>1</sup> J. Day, *Psalms* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 1999), 12.

## **2. has a complaint,**

*2 I sink in deep mire,*

*Where there is no standing;*

*I have come into deep waters,*

*Where the floods overflow me.*

*3 I am weary with my crying;*

*My throat is dry;*

*My eyes fail while I wait for my God.*

*4 Those who hate me without a cause*

*Are more than the hairs of my head;*

*They are mighty who would destroy me,*

*Being my enemies wrongfully;*

*Though I have stolen nothing,*

*I still must restore it. (Ps 69:2-4NKJV)*

## **3. a petition,**

*13 But as for me, my prayer is to You,*

*O LORD, in the acceptable time;*

*O God, in the multitude of Your mercy,*

*Hear me in the truth of Your salvation.*

*14 Deliver me out of the mire,*

*And let me not sink;*

*Let me be delivered from those who hate me,*

*And out of the deep waters.*

*15 Let not the floodwater overflow me,*

*Nor let the deep swallow me up;*

*And let not the pit shut its mouth on me. (Ps 69:13-15NKJV)*

## **4. a statement of confidence in God**

*32 The humble will see their God at work and be glad.*

*Let all who seek God's help be encouraged.*

*33 For the LORD hears the cries of the needy;*

*he does not despise his imprisoned people. (Ps 69:32-33NLT)*

## **5. and a statement of praise.**

*Then I will praise God's name with singing,*

*and I will honour him with thanksgiving. (Ps 69:30 NLT)*

They are not always in a specific order, and not all lament psalms have all 5.

### **Psalm 88:**

- is a lament psalm that was evidently written by Heman the Ezrahite.
- Although the majority of Lament psalms typically have the five components I mentioned present, this psalm only has the first three.
- Heman never moves to a position of stating confidence in God,
- or praising God.
- In a sense, the psalm never resolves.
- In fact, Heman ends the psalm lamenting how darkness has become his closest friend.
- This psalm is surely one of the darkest passages in scripture. And yet it was included for a reason.

**88** A SONG. A PSALM OF THE SONS OF KORAH. TO THE CHOIRMASTER: ACCORDING TO MAHALATH LEANNOT. A MASKIL OF HEMAN THE EZRAHITE.

<sup>1</sup> O LORD, God of my salvation, I cry out day and night before you.	God hear my prayer
<sup>2</sup> Let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry!	
<sup>3</sup> For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol.	My life draws near to the grave
<sup>4</sup> I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am a man who has no strength,	
<sup>5</sup> like one set loose among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand.	You have forgotten me
<sup>6</sup> You have put me in the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep.	You have afflicted me
<sup>7</sup> Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves. <i>Selah</i>	
<sup>8</sup> You have caused my companions to shun me; you have made me a horror to them. I am shut in so that I cannot escape;	You have made me an abomination
<sup>9</sup> my eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call upon you, O LORD; I spread out my hands to you.	Why have you not answered?
<sup>10</sup> Do you work wonders for the dead? Do the departed rise up to praise you? <i>Selah</i>	
<sup>11</sup> Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, or your faithfulness in Abaddon?	What profit is there in my death?
<sup>12</sup> Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?	
<sup>13</sup> But I, O LORD, cry to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you.	Why have you cast off my soul?
<sup>14</sup> O LORD, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me?	
<sup>15</sup> Afflicted and close to death from my youth up, I suffer your terrors; I am helpless.	You have afflicted me from my youth
<sup>16</sup> Your wrath has swept over me; your dreadful assaults destroy me.	
<sup>17</sup> They surround me like a flood all day long; they close in on me together.	
<sup>18</sup> You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness.	You have separated me from loved ones

For all intents and purposes Heman was successful by earthly standards. As David Guzik notes in his commentary on Psalm 88 (*Enduring Word*), if all the Old Testament references to Heman are the same man, then Heman was:

- wise (1 Kings 4:31),
- in service to the king (1 Chron 25:6),
- accomplished in his musicianship (1 Chron 6:33; 15:17-19; 16:41-42)
- and had many exceptional sons and daughters (1 Chron 25:5-6).

There is no glaring fault, sin or reason that we can see for him to be in this desperate place. Yet he found himself in a long, dark season of physical affliction and we don't know how long it lasted or how it ended.

In the midst of his pain and anguish,

- Heman never questioned the goodness of God,
- or existence of God.
- He never became bitter or angry with God, or anyone else.
- In fact, he continued to pour out his anguish honestly before God, crying out night and day to God for His intervention.

This man appears to have been an upstanding man in the community, yet he suffered for an extended indefinite period. The honest desperation of his cries with no apparent answer from God or resolution that we know of and His perseverance in prayer are **surprising, inspirational and comforting**.

If we look through the book of psalms, psalm 1 begins showing the difference between those who walk in the ways of the Word of God and those who do not.

***Psalms 1 (NKJV)***

***The Way of the Righteous and the End of the Ungodly***

***1 Blessed is the man***

***Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,***

***Nor stands in the path of sinners,***

***Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;***

***2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD,***

***And in His law he meditates day and night.***

***3 He shall be like a tree***

*Planted by the rivers of water,  
That brings forth its fruit in its season,  
Whose leaf also shall not wither;  
And whatever he does shall prosper.*  
*4 The ungodly are not so,  
But are like the chaff which the wind drives away.*  
*5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment,  
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.*  
*6 For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
But the way of the ungodly shall perish.*

But very soon, we begin to see that there are many situations which can appear like God is absent.

#### *Psalms 3:1-2 NKJV*

*A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son.*

*1 LORD, how they have increased who trouble me!*

*Many are they who rise up against me.*

*2 Many are they who say of me,*

*“There is no help for him in God.”*

*Selah*

#### *Psalms 10:1-11 (NKJV)*

*1 Why do You stand afar off, O LORD?*

*Why do You hide in times of trouble?*

*2 The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor;*

*Let them be caught in the plots which they have devised.*

*3 For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire;*

*He blesses the greedy and renounces the LORD.*

*4 The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God;*

*God is in none of his thoughts.*

*5 His ways are always prospering;*

*Your judgments are far above, out of his sight;*

*As for all his enemies, he sneers at them.*

*6 He has said in his heart, “I shall not be moved;*

*I shall never be in adversity.”*



*7 His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression;*

*Under his tongue is trouble and iniquity.*

*8 He sits in the lurking places of the villages;*

*In the secret places he murders the innocent;*

*His eyes are secretly fixed on the helpless.*

*9 He lies in wait secretly, as a lion in his den;*

*He lies in wait to catch the poor;*

*He catches the poor when he draws him into his net.*

*10 So he crouches, he lies low,*

*That the helpless may fall by his strength.*

*11 He has said in his heart,*

*"God has forgotten;*

*He hides His face;*

*He will never see."*

The psalmists crying out asking why the wicked appear to prosper, the psalmists crying out for God to intervene, asking why His answer tarries. And so we find that life in God on this earth is not simple. Exclusion from calamities, pain and suffering is not guaranteed. When we have been Christians for any length of time, and grow in maturity, we discover that God's journey and process and timeline is not necessarily what we would have picked out for ourselves.

If I take myself and my physical health as an example: I have had incessant sicknesses, injuries, pain over the last 5 years. I am an athlete. I love being active, I have competed at many 70. Ironman triathlons and 2 world championships. I love mountain bike ultra marathon racing. It has formed a very big part of my life. It has been part of my processing and dealing with life. And God meets me on my bike rides and in my races. I love it. I have prayed for myself and fellow athletes, for protection and found myself being the target of freak accidents and an apparent intentional accident too. I have gone for scans, injections, infiltrations, surgeries, rehab, scans, infiltrations surgeries, rinse and repeat. And through it all, of course there is the question, why Lord? Last year the pain was so bad that it was debilitating... sit for 20 min max, stand for 8 in max. Couldn't go to shops, impacted household responsibilities. Surgery Nov last year and now end of July. And this has been ripped from me. And I will never be the same again. I have had in depth

conversations with the surgeon about the risks associated with trying to run, or doing some of the things I used to do in training and racing. My life has changed.

Why am I telling you this? Because there are dark season in life. Seasons where we need to hold on to His Word, even if we can't see His fingerprints and answer.

I know that God has been working in me these past 5 years. I have moved through a season of desperation and frustration to a season of trusting God in the midst of the pain. I am praying. So I trusting that He will work things out the best way He knows, and for His purposes. That He will reward me... in this life and the next.

**Excerpt from James Russell Lowell's Poem "The Present Crisis"**

*"Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,—  
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,  
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own."*

**Hymn by Annie J Fint:**

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater;  
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase.  
To added affliction He addeth His mercy;  
to multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,  
when our strength has failed ere the day is half done,  
when we reach the end of our hoarded resources,  
our Father's full giving is only begun.

His love has no limit; His grace has no measure.  
His pow'r has no boundary known unto men.  
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,  
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again!

I love what Jack Deere says:

### **Jack Deere: “Even in our Darkness” – A Story of Beauty in a broken life)**

- a. *My first memory is of Dad carrying me through the basement of a department store. His arms never rested to put me down. By the cash register lay a pocket knife. It looked just like the one he carried. I begged him for it and cried when he handed me the rubber imitation. Dad could have told me that a two-year-old lacks the fine motor skills to carry a knife and that giving me a blade would have only produced blood. But I would not have understood. For years, I have besieged heaven with thousands of prayers that seemed to go unanswered. Still, I return to that brown leather chair. It is old and worn like me, but I lean back and let it hold me. As I close my eyes, I can sometimes sense the Spirit of God hovering. When I lusted after material wealth, he turned my gaze toward eternity. When I sought large crowds, he brought me humility. When I tried to change my wife, he taught me how to love and understand her. What I really needed all along, more than anything, was to see myself through his eyes.*
- b. *God took away just about everything I used to fuel my self-esteem until there was nothing left except his love. And for the first time, I felt his love apart from anything I could offer him. And then I no longer needed a better story.*

And he has a hectic story.

And so I feel like God has prepared me to share this. That this is where I am right now. And so as I share this, I too, am reminding myself of the truth of His Word and His promises. And He is not a man that He should lie. He knows what He is about.

God is more concerned about our character than our comfort. God is more concerned about our formation than getting us to our goal. Because once we have the character to contain what He wants to give us, oh He can answer our prayers in a moment!

When God wants to drill a man,  
And thrill a man,  
And skill a man  
When God wants to mould a man  
To play the noblest part;

When He yearns with all His heart  
To create so great and bold a man  
That all the world shall be amazed,  
Watch His methods, watch His ways!

How He ruthlessly perfects  
Whom He royally elects!  
How He hammers him and hurts him,  
And with mighty blows converts him

Into trial shapes of clay which  
Only God understands;  
While his tortured heart is crying  
And he lifts beseeching hands!

How He bends but never breaks  
When his good He undertakes;  
How He uses whom He chooses,  
And which every purpose fuses him;  
By every act induces him  
To try His splendour out-  
God knows what He's about.

– Anonymous

There is a reason why James instructs us:

James 1:2-4 (AMP)

Consider it nothing but joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you fall into various trials. Be assured that the testing of your faith [through experience] produces endurance [leading to spiritual maturity, and inner peace]. And let endurance have its

*perfect result and do a thorough work, so that you may be perfect and completely developed [in your faith], lacking in nothing.*

And so today I want to encourage you to not grow weary whilst doing good. God is at work in and through us. Let's choose to stay the course. Let's choose to be those who endure and receive our ultimate reward.

*1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (NKJV)*

*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*

We need to endure hardship and delays, difficulties and trials, understanding that these are part of life, part of God's process, but they are not the end of our story.

*2 Timothy 2:3-5 (NKJV)*

*You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*

Sometimes, like the disciples we can find ourselves choosing to remaining in Him for the lone reason that He has the Words of life.

*John 6:66-68 (NKJV)*

*From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*

## **Hope in the Tension**

Family, I stand here not as someone with all the answers, but as someone who has wrestled with God in the dark. For five years my body has been a battlefield—injuries, procedures, the slow grief of losing what I love. Cycling and triathlon weren't just hobbies; they were where God often met me. And then came pain, limits,

surgeries, and the hard conversations where a surgeon names what you may never do again. In that place I've asked, "Why, Lord?"—and I know many of you have too.

Yet in the shadow, God has been at work. He has shifted me from desperation to trust; from grasping for outcomes to surrendering to His character. He is more committed to our formation than to our comfort, because when our character can carry it, He can answer in a moment (Jas 1:2–4). So we run—not for a perishable medal, but for an imperishable crown (1 Cor 9:24–27). We endure hardship like good soldiers, staying unentangled so we can please the One who enlisted us (2 Tim 2:3–5). And when the questions stay louder than the answers, we say with Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:66–68).

Some of us are on the scaffold of truth, where wrong looks like it's still on the throne; but behind what we can't see, our God keeps watch over His own. When our strength is gone by midday and our resources feel emptied out, His grace is not. Where afflictions add up, He multiplies mercy. In the workshop of our lives, He is shaping vessels that can carry glory. He bends, but He does not break. He knows what He's about.

So here's the invitation today: bring Him your "why" and your "how long." Lay down the timeline and take up trust. Choose the long obedience—one lap, one prayer, one act of faithfulness at a time. Let's be a people who keep showing up in the dark because we know the dawn belongs to Jesus.

### **Response:**

If you're in a dark season, would you open your hands right where you are—as a sign of surrender? If hope feels thin, borrow some of ours today. If you've been fighting God for an outcome, trade it now for His presence.

### **Prayer:**

Father, we place our unfinished stories in Your faithful hands. Where our hearts ache, pour out Your nearness. Where our strength is small, give endurance. Form the character of Christ in us while we wait. Teach us to run for an imperishable crown, to fight with purpose, and to endure as good soldiers. Jesus, we choose You again—because where else can we go? You have the words of eternal life. Come, Holy Spirit—steady, strengthen, and fill us with living hope. In Jesus' name, amen.

