

**“A Prayer for Restoration”**  
**Psalm 80**  
**August 5, 2018**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

The theme of Psalm 80 is found in the verse that is repeated three times (v. 3, 7, 19), a verse that appears at the beginning, middle and end of the psalm. **“Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!”** The likely historical situation behind the composition of this psalm is that time period between 722 B.C. and 586 B.C. Remember that the nation had been split into two nations after the reign of King Solomon. The northern nation was called “Israel” or “Samaria” in the Bible, and the southern nation was referred to as “Judah.” In 722 B.C., the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom, which the Bible says happened because of Israel’s idolatry. The same thing would happen in 586 B.C. to the southern kingdom of Judah, conquered by the Babylonians. So this psalm was written as the few remaining people in the small southern kingdom of Judah witnessed the devastation wrought upon the northern kingdom. Perhaps the psalmist saw the likelihood of the same thing happening to Judah that had happened to Israel. He wants Judah to be renewed in order to avoid the same outcome as their brothers and sisters in the north.

The theme of this psalm, restoration for God’s people, lies at the heart of the central message of the Bible. It is a message that is both simple and beautiful. The human race has fallen into sin, which brings ruin and destruction. But God, through Jesus Christ, acts with costly grace to restore that which has been broken. The word “restore” is such a good, hope-filled word. Our sin has brought such brokenness to our lives and to those around us, but God, by his grace and power, restores broken things.

Have you noticed how it is almost always far more difficult to restore something that is broken than it is to make something new? Most of you were not here at this church in 1983 when this sanctuary was completed. This church has been in this location since 1911, and by the early 80’s it was becoming evident that the growth in the church was going to require a building expansion. The first plan was to expand the original 1911 structure. But then it was discovered that it would be far cheaper simply to tear it down and start over again, which is what ended up happening. It is the same with people. God’s creation of humanity was far easier for him than was the restoration of humanity. Instead of taking the easy route by wiping out the old and starting over again, God redeemed the brokenness of humanity, at great cost to himself.

Do you find yourself in need of restoration right now? Perhaps you are keenly aware of much brokenness in your life. The truth is that we are all

broken in significant ways. So this psalm is good news to us, not only stating the possibility of restoration, but also describing its path. Let's look at that now.

## **I. The Mark of Restoration – the Shining Face of God**

How do you know if you need restoration? The answer is found in the prayer for the face of God to shine. What does that mean? It means to experience the presence of God. The “face” is our way of speaking about the essence of a person. If a photograph lacks a person's face, we don't think of it as a picture of that person at all. If I show you a photograph that is a picture of me from the waist down, no one would say, “That's a picture of Brad.” It would not be inaccurate to say, “That's a picture of Brad's legs,” but no one would say that it is a picture of me. It takes a face to capture the essence of a person.

The phrase goes on to speak of the shining face of God. What does it mean to say that God's face is shining? We speak similarly when we talk about the lighting up of a person's face. For example, when two people in the early stages of falling in love are together, we might say, “Did you see how his face lit up when she entered the room?” This is a prayer, then, for God's smile to replace his anger. It is asking for a return of his favor.

What is your response to a person who doesn't like you and who makes it clear that he doesn't like you? You want to avoid that person, don't you? What is your response to someone who really does like you and makes it clear that she enjoys your presence? Aren't you drawn to such a person? If you see God with a big frown on his face when he thinks about you, you aren't going to want to be around him. If you see God's face shining, with a big smile lighting up his face when he thinks of you, you will be drawn to him.

We're going to consider in our next point how it happens that we come to see God's shining face, but for now I simply want us to see this as the mark of restoration. This is how you know you have been restored by God. You are experiencing the joy of his presence. The mark of God's restoration isn't that you have become a nice person. It isn't that you keep your grass mowed and your bills paid. It isn't that you come to church most Sundays. Rather, it is that you have tasted of the royal wine of heaven through experiencing the joy of God's presence. Is that a description of your life? If not, you are in need of restoration. The truth is that we are all in various stages of needing such renewal. Our next point tells us how we get it.

## **II. The Means of Restoration – Conversion**

Some of your Bibles have a footnote beside the word “restore,” a footnote that gives the more literal translation of the Hebrew word used here. It says “turn us again.” This is a word that has in view conversion. The idea is that we might be restored through conversion. Who are those who experience the smiling, shining face of God? Only the converted.

The first step of conversion is the recognition that you are in a bad place, a place from which you need to be converted. Notice how much of this psalm describes such a bad place. Verses 4-6 describe the devastation that had come upon Israel and now looks likely to come upon Judah. God was angry with his people’s prayers (v. 4). The language is striking. The word for God’s anger here is one that means to smolder. God is so angry that smoke is coming out of his ears. This is probably a play on the common Old Testament idea of prayer as the sweet-smelling smoke of incense rising to God. Incense was often burned in the temple to signify the sweetness of the people’s prayers rising from the temple. There is indeed smoke in these prayers, but it is the smoke of anger. Because their hearts had turned from God, even the most spiritual thing they do, prayer, is such an insult to God that it provokes his anger.

Verse 5 speaks of an emotional disintegration, seen in the fact that they can’t stop crying. **“You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in full measure.”** Verse 6 describes Israel’s complete defeat before their enemies. **“You make us an object of contention for our neighbors.”** That is likely describing what happens when Israel’s enemies fight over the spoils from Israel after she is defeated in battle. **“Our enemies laugh among themselves.”** To the suffering brought about by defeat is now added shame.

Verses 8-13 liken Israel to a vine planted by God. God took this vine from Egypt and planted it and tended it in the land promised to them. Under his hand, this vine flourished until it filled the entire land, bringing life-giving fruit to many. But then God removed the wall of protection around his vineyard, and it was ravaged by all the wild animals until almost nothing was left of it.

These verses are making the point that when we try to live without God, life disintegrates. Years ago, I read John Updike’s novel *In the Beauty of the Lilies*. The novel begins with Reverend Clarence Arthur Wilmot, pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Church of Paterson, NJ, deciding that he no longer believes in God. It’s the year 1910, and he has just read a book by the famous atheist Robert Ingersoll and discovers that he no longer believes in God. Many modern novels tend to portray such an abandonment of faith in God as honest and courageous. Not Updike. The rest of the novel catalogues the disintegration of this family for several generations, all stemming from this turn from God.

A similar thing happens at a corporate level when God’s people forget God. As measured by almost any standard, the Church in America today is in a

period of decline. Every year more than 4000 churches close their doors, while only 1000 new churches are planted. In the decade from 1990-2000, it is calculated that 38,000 fewer churches were planted than what would have been needed just to keep up with population growth. You might wonder, “Wouldn’t growing churches help in keeping up with ministry to a growing population?” They would, if they were growing. But half of all churches in the US did not add any new members to their ranks in the last two years. Polls have long indicated that about 40% of Americans attend church regularly. But that number came from asking people about their church attendance. When the polling started from the other direction, by asking churches about their actual attendance, it was discovered that only about 20% of Americans attend church on a given Sunday.

The reason for such decline is not hard to see. The Church has left out God. Several years ago, I was checking out the website of a large Presbyterian church our family attended when we lived in Indianapolis. As I recall, the website said something like this about the pastor of that church. “In the most well-known sermon Pastor Barb ever preached at our church, she said nothing about God, Jesus, heaven, hell or sin. It was a sermon about growing tomatoes.” Not only had they left God out, they were proud of it. Evangelical churches are all too often not that different, turning much of their attention to entertainment or to tips for practical living instead of the life-giving gospel.

What is the answer? Whether it is for you as an individual or for the church as a whole, the first step is to own the problem and acknowledge our need for restoration. And then we do what the psalmist did—we pray for God to turn us and restore us to himself. Verse 17 tells us how God will answer that prayer. **“But let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!”** That is fulfilled, of course, in our Lord Jesus. This is describing repentance and faith. If you want the specific steps for renewal, here they are, in these familiar friends. We repent of trying to live without God and turn to him in faith.

### **III. The Goal of Restoration – That We May Be Saved**

The prayer concludes with a request for our salvation, our deliverance. There is no deliverance for us outside of God. We cannot restore ourselves—only God can do that. So we look to him to do so. He knows how to restore broken things. He restores broken people.

I recently read Rosario Butterfield’s book that relates the story of her conversion and titled *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*. She was a professor of feminist studies at Syracuse University, a practicing lesbian and a vocal opponent of Christianity. But through the kind hospitality of a Presbyterian pastor and his wife over a period of about two years, she

converted to Christianity and ended up marrying a Presbyterian pastor herself. She and her husband have adopted several children and have also been active in foster care. She ends her book by telling the story of an 8-year old boy who came to live with them for a time as a foster child. She refers to him in the book simply by use of the initial “J”. J came to them when Child Protective Services called one day and asked if they could take in a sibling group of five, all with special needs. J was mentally retarded and mute. They learned that all five of the children had been neglected, abused, and had witnessed the murder of one of their siblings by their mother’s hand. After praying about it, they said they could only take one of them, and J came to live there for a time. As soon as he arrived at their house, it became evident that he was terrified of dogs, cats, bathtubs, vacuum cleaners, doorways, darkness, and loud noises. They learned this, not because he could tell them (remember that he was mute) but because of the wide-eyed fear that was all too evident in his face. But in time, as he joined in the activities of the family—the learning, the family devotions, the play and the mutual love—things began to change. He started talking and proved himself to be quite intelligent and a lover of books. He was eventually adopted by a Christian family who agreed to take another of his siblings. I like Rosario’s conclusion about this adventure with J. “Mercy ministry always comes down to this: you can help, but only Jesus can heal.”

## **CONCLUSION:**

Are you in need of healing and restoration in your life? If we’re honest, we would all have to acknowledge that our need for restoration and renewal in our life is unending. There is good news in this psalm. Since God is the ultimate author of these words, we can know that he is the one who wants us to pray the words he repeats three times. **“Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!”** The psalmist is undoubtedly thinking of the great Aaronic blessing, the one we often use as a benediction. **“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace”** (Numbers 6:24-26). Don’t forget the words that preface that great benediction. **“The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to Aaron and his son, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel.’”** It was at the Lord’s direction that Aaron and his sons were to pronounce this benediction. The Lord directed thus because he was eagerly desiring to grant such a thing. God wants you to pray this prayer because he wants your soul to be renewed and restored. So let’s go to him now and ask for this renewal.