

## MIDWEEK OF LENT 4: STUDENT

## THE PENITENTIAL PSALMS: PSALM 102

## THEME VERSE

“But You, O LORD, are enthroned forever.” (Psalm 102:12)

## TEXTS

Psalm

102

Small Catechism, Confession: *What sins should we confess?*

## INTRODUCTION

Simon and Garfunkel once lamented, “I am a rock, I am an island.” Although they probably didn’t intend it, that is the picture we get in Psalm 102 of life without God, and the separation that sin causes in our lives. But forgiveness is really about reconnecting us with God, and therefore with one another as well.

## QUESTIONS

Q1. Pray Psalm 102 responsively together by whole verse.

Q2. Read Psalm 102:1–2. Why is it necessary for the psalmist to ask God to listen? Why would God hide His face from the psalmist, or delay in answering his prayers?

Q3. Read Psalm 102:3–5. Why would our lives under affliction be like smoke, or burned up as in a fiery furnace? Why does suffering (either from our own sins or the sins of others) lead to such desperate distraction or even physical pain? This section may remind us of Job, where he also talks about his skin barely hanging onto his bones (Job 19:20).

Q4. Read Psalm 102:6–11. He now moves into his relationship with others. The descriptions are stark, even terrifying. He is like a lone owl in the wilderness, or a sparrow on the housetop. He is taunted by his enemies, and even his name has become a cruel joke. Why does sin cause such dramatic changes in relationships? How has sin damaged your relationships, and do you think it was fair for sin to do so?

Q5. Read Psalm 102:12–15. Notice the contrast between the fleeting nature of the psalmist's life and the eternal character of God. Does this offer comfort or does it cause distress? Why? Notice also that God's timing is not ours. When did God fully demonstrate His timing in saving the world?

Q6. Read Psalm 102:16–17. God's glory is tied to His great presence among us. How is God's glory connected with the prayer of the destitute? What is God's glory? Where do we look today to find God's glory? Where do we hear in church about God regarding the lowly (hint: Magnificat and Benedictus)? The Magnificat is the song of Mary in Luke 1:46–55. The Benedictus is the song of Zechariah in Luke 1:67–79.

Luther writes concerning the glory of God:

That is, He is revealed through His Word and Spirit, so that He becomes known as the one who alone is and does everything, while we are nothing. Is. 11:9: "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord." Ps. 19:1: "The heavens are telling the glory of God." (AE 14:184)

Q7. Read Psalm 102:18–22. Why does the psalmist want this recorded? What are the prisoners groaning about, and who were those doomed to die? What is the result of their liberty? Why is it that the life of the Christian so often is one of suffering? How might this apply to Individual Confession and Absolution?

The purpose of confession is not for God, and it is certainly not for the pastor. The purpose of confession is for the one confessing their sins (sometimes called the *penitent*). Here are the words from our section on the catechism for this week:

*What sins should we confess?* Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even those we are not aware of, as we do in the Lord's Prayer; but before the pastor we should confess only those sins which we know and feel in our hearts.

The sins we confess to the pastors are the ones that we know (by the Law is the knowledge of sin), and feel (guilt) in our hearts. In other words, we confess what troubles us. The purpose of Confession and Absolution is absolution, that is, forgiveness. This section of Psalm 102 bears that out beautifully.

God permits this suffering to continue not because He is spiteful or capricious but out of love. Luther writes,

It is, as stated above, the characteristic of His kingdom that God permits His own to suffer much and to be children of death and sheep for the slaughter, as St. Paul says (Rom. 8:36). But they are not forsaken on this account; they are certain that He hears their groans and their misery. (AE 14:185)

Q8. Read Psalm 102:23–28. The psalmist repeats the contrast between the fleeting nature of our lives and the eternal character of God. He specifically highlights that God's enemies (and ours) will fall away and wear out like an old shirt. How might this relate to Jesus' death and resurrection? How does this offer comfort for troubled sinners? How might we use this to comfort others who are troubled?

### CONCLUSION

Sin is lonely. It separates and divides. It creates conflict and pain everywhere it goes. Our body feels it. Our enemies know it. Even our friends and families know it. But God is merciful and gracious. He sent His Son, Jesus, at just the right time to save us. His eternal judgment of "forgiven" is delivered to you in Holy Absolution. Rejoice in His gift of love to you!

**Psalm 102****Do Not Hide Your Face from Me****A Prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the Lord.**

1 Hear my prayer, O Lord;  
let my cry come to you!

2 Do not hide your face from me  
in the day of my distress!

Incline your ear to me;  
answer me speedily in the day when I call!

3 For my days pass away like smoke,  
and my bones burn like a furnace.

4 My heart is struck down like grass and has  
withered;

I forget to eat my bread.

5 Because of my loud groaning  
my bones cling to my flesh.

6 I am like a desert owl of the wilderness,  
like an owl of the waste places;

7 I lie awake;  
I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop.

8 All the day my enemies taunt me;  
those who deride me use my name for a  
curse.

9 For I eat ashes like bread  
and mingle tears with my drink,

10 because of your indignation and anger;  
for you have taken me up and thrown me  
down.

11 My days are like an evening shadow;  
I wither away like grass.

12 But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever;  
you are remembered throughout all  
generations.

13 You will arise and have pity on Zion;  
it is the time to favor her;  
the appointed time has come.

14 For your servants hold her stones dear  
and have pity on her dust.

15 Nations will fear the name of the Lord,  
and all the kings of the earth will fear your  
glory.

16 For the Lord builds up Zion;  
he appears in his glory;

17 he regards the prayer of the destitute  
and does not despise their prayer.

18 Let this be recorded for a generation to  
come,  
so that a people yet to be created may praise  
the Lord:

19 that he looked down from his holy height;  
from heaven the Lord looked at the earth,

20 to hear the groans of the prisoners,  
to set free those who were doomed to die,

21 that they may declare in Zion the name of  
the Lord,

and in Jerusalem his praise,  
22 when peoples gather together,  
and kingdoms, to worship the Lord.

23 He has broken my strength in midcourse;  
he has shortened my days.

24 "O my God," I say, "take me not away  
in the midst of my days—  
you whose years endure  
throughout all generations!"

25 Of old you laid the foundation of the earth,  
and the heavens are the work of your hands.

26 They will perish, but you will remain;  
they will all wear out like a garment.

You will change them like a robe, and they will  
pass away,

27 but you are the same, and your years have  
no end.

28 The children of your servants shall dwell  
secure;

their offspring shall be established before  
you.

## Question 3:

Job 19:20-22

20 My bones stick to my skin and to my flesh,  
and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth.

21 Have mercy on me, have mercy on me, O

you my friends,  
for the hand of God has touched me!  
22 Why do you, like God, pursue me?  
Why are you not satisfied with my flesh?

For more understanding refer to Psalm 90 & 78

Question 4:

This has all happened because of God's righteous anger toward the psalmist. He withers away like the grass (2 Kings 19:26; Psalm 90:5; 92:7; 103:15; 1 Peter 1:24).

**2 Kings 19:26**

26 while their inhabitants, shorn of strength,  
are dismayed and confounded,  
and have become like plants of the field  
and like tender grass,  
like grass on the housetops,  
blighted before it is grown.

**Psalm 90:5**

5 You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream,  
like grass that is renewed in the morning:

**1 Peter 1:22-25**

22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; 24 for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, 25 but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

Question 5:

**Galatians 4:1-6**

4 I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave,[a] though he is the owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. 3 In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles[b] of the world. 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/may-web-only/martin-luther-coronavirus-black-plague-alien-work-of-god.html>

The Law of God is called "alien work

But Luther firmly believed that God is good. God's very nature is ardent, self-giving love—this is foundational for Luther. Human beings, on the other hand, are deeply sinful and strongly prone to self-deification in all things. Even Christians have to engage in a daily, life-or-death battle with the "old Adam" (or "old Eve"), which they can only win by divine grace. Many are also prone—as he himself was prone—to see God as an angry judge who is easily provoked to wrath. Luther knew firsthand that when such souls experience suffering, they nearly always view it as divine punishment for sin.

The phrase "alien work of God" was Luther's pastoral response, putting all of these beliefs and concerns together and offering some comfort in the midst of overwhelming suffering. The term expresses

Luther's desire to assure Christians that God is for them, never against them, despite appearances to the contrary.

Gospel is called His "proper work."

Question 6:

In the Old Testament the glory of God is described as a cloud that ascends and descends

**Hebrews 1:3**

3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

**Revelation 15:8**

8 and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

**Revelation 21:23**

23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

**Proverbs 25:1-3**

More Proverbs of Solomon

25 These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied.

2 It is the glory of God to conceal things,  
but the glory of kings is to search things out.

3 As the heavens for height, and the earth for depth,  
so the heart of kings is unsearchable.

**Matthew 11:25**

25 At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children;

**Luke 10:21**

21 In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

Question 8:

**Psalms 90:10**

10 The years of our life are seventy,  
or even by reason of strength eighty;  
yet their span[a] is but toil and trouble;  
they are soon gone, and we fly away.

Acts 2:38

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.