

Psalm 39 (NASB)

I said, "I will guard my ways
That I may not sin with my tongue;
I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle
While the wicked are in my presence."

I was mute and silent,
I refrained even from good,
And my sorrow grew worse.
My heart was hot within me,
While I was musing the fire burned;
Then I spoke with my tongue:
"LORD, make me to know my end
And what is the extent of my days;
Let me know how transient I am.

"Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths,
And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight;
Surely every man at his best is a mere breath. (Selah.)
"Surely every man walks about as a phantom;
Surely they make an uproar for nothing;
He amasses riches and does not know who will gather them.

"And now, Lord, for what do I wait?
My hope is in You.

"Deliver me from all my transgressions;
Make me not the reproach of the foolish.

"I have become mute, I do not open my mouth,
Because it is You who have done it.

"Remove Your plague from me;
Because of the opposition of Your hand I am perishing.

"With reproofs You chasten a man for iniquity;
You consume as a moth what is precious to him;
Surely every man is a mere breath. (Selah.)

"Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry;
Do not be silent at my tears;
For I am a stranger with You,
A sojourner like all my fathers.

"Turn Your gaze away from me, that I may smile again
Before I depart and am no more."

In this psalm we see into the troubled heart of a man who is languishing because of sin's consequences. The psalmist may be sick or in physical decline, and he sounds like he has been broken. Whatever rebelliousness he once possessed is gone. Now, he understands that life is fragile and fades too quickly. Earthly pursuits are empty without God; life is completely meaningless without God.

This sad psalmist does not yet feel the release of forgiveness. But he has not given up on God. His punishment has taught him about God's sovereignty and justice, and now he waits for God's mercy.

We all know the agony of waiting for God's mercy. We've felt the pain of punishment for our sins. That pain, at times, has driven some people away from God. This psalmist, however, understands that his pain is a result of going against God. He doesn't blame God for God's justice. Sometimes we blame God for the consequences that we have brought on ourselves, but we—like this psalmist—should wait for God in humility, because He will not withhold His compassion forever.