



HOPE IN HARD TIMES

Reflections From
Our Daily Bread

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INTRODUCTION

IN NEED

It was quite a month for our family. First, my wife had emergency surgery that left her battling poison in her system. Then, our daughter had a difficult surgery. Just a few days later, our grandson was hospitalised with pneumonia and bronchitis. It was a challenging time of frustration and reversals. But it was much more than that.

As a minister, I've spent hundreds of hours visiting people in the hospital. Sometimes I was there to celebrate a baby's birth, but most of the time my hospital visits were more necessary than joyful. When we're hurting, we need help. We need prayer. We need encouragement.

Now, as never before, our family was in need of that encouragement—and others came through for us. People brought meals and wrote cards. Pastors called. Hospital staff were kind and encouraging. It was humbling and thrilling to be on the receiving end of such compassion, in part because we needed it so very much.

Times of pain and illness show us how vulnerable we are. Our struggles intensify. Strength is lost. Even the most

caring friends or loved ones can't help. Our dependency is bigger than us—but not bigger than God.

The Bible says many things about this heavenly Father, but trouble reveals that He is the very present help we desperately need. He is more than enough to compensate for our inadequacy, and His faithfulness provides new mercies every morning. Statements of His care for us become more than religious words.

God's Word is the lifeline of hope and trust.

This special edition is dedicated to those who are hurting and those who care for the hurting. These *Our Daily Bread* Bible reading notes remind those on this journey that God gives strength to the weak and hope to the desperate. God meets us where

we are, welcomes us into His arms and helps us with our needs. When we call on Him, He is with us, and we are never alone. He walks the path of pain with us.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (ROMANS 15:13). This God of hope is present—even now. May His strength comfort you and those you love in challenging times. 🌟

**TROUBLE
REVEALS THAT
THIS HEAVENLY
FATHER IS THE
VERY PRESENT HELP
WE DESPERATELY
NEED.**

Bill Crowder, *Our Daily Bread* writer

TODAY'S BIBLE READING **Isaiah 40:21–31**

 ²¹ Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? ²² He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. ²³ He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. ²⁴ No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

²⁵ “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One. ²⁶ Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

²⁷ Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, “My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God?” ²⁸ Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. ²⁹ He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. ³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; ³¹ but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Notes

Skywatcher

Unsettled by some recent difficult news, Matt decided to take a walk. The evening spring air beckoned. As the infinite sky deepened from blue to black, a thickening fog spilled slowly over the marsh. Stars began to glimmer, heralding the full moon rising in the east. The moment, for Matt, was deeply spiritual. *He's there*, he thought. *God is there, and He's got this.*

Some people look at the night sky and see nothing but nature. Others see a god as distant and cold as Jupiter. But the same God who “sits enthroned above the circle of the earth” also “brings out the starry host one by one and calls them forth each of them by name” (ISAIAH 40:22, 26). He knows His creation intimately.

It is this intimate God who asked His people, “Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God’? Do you not know? Have you not heard? . . . He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak” (VV. 27–29).

We are easily tempted to forget God. Our problems won't disappear with an evening stroll, but we can find rest and certainty that God is always working towards His good purposes. “I'm here,” He says. “I've got you.” 🌌

Isaiah 40:26

He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls them forth each of them by name.

TIM GUSTAFSON

*We should give God the same place in our hearts
that He holds in the universe.*

 ¹⁴ Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem! ¹⁵ The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. ¹⁶ On that day they will say to Jerusalem, “Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. ¹⁷ The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.”

¹⁸ “I will remove from you all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals, which is a burden and reproach for you. ¹⁹ At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honour in every land where they have suffered shame. ²⁰ At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honour and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes,” says the LORD.

Notes

Forced Leisure

Just before Christmas one year, a friend was diagnosed with leukaemia and was told she must begin chemotherapy immediately. Just a few weeks earlier, Kim had told friends how blessed and content she felt with a loving family, a comfortable home and a new grandson. As she entered the hospital, Kim asked Jesus to make His presence known to her and to stay close.

The next seven months of treatments followed by recovery in partial isolation became a season she calls “forced leisure”. She says she learned how to slow down, reflect quietly and rest in God’s goodness, love and perfect plan—regardless of whether or not she would be healed.

One of God’s promises to His people Israel became personal to Kim: “The LORD your God . . . is the mighty warrior who saves. He will take delight in you; in his love, he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing” (ZEPHANIAH 3:17).

Kim is in remission after a journey she says changed her life for the better. Now back in her busy routine, she often pauses to recapture the lessons of “forced leisure”.

How important that we—in good times or times of challenge—draw near to God’s loving heart to hear His voice and place our lives in His hands. 🙏

Zephaniah 3:17

The LORD your God is . . . the mighty warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love, he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.

DAVID MCCASLAND

People are at the heart of God's heart.

TODAY'S BIBLE READING **Luke 18:1–8**

 ¹ Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ² He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. ³ And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

⁴ “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”

⁶ And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

Notes

Unanswered

One of my biggest struggles is unanswered prayer. Maybe you can relate. You ask God to rescue a friend from addiction, to grant salvation to a loved one, to heal a sick child, to mend a relationship. All these things you think must be God's will. For years you pray. But you hear nothing back from Him and you see no results.

You remind the Lord that He's powerful. That your request is a good thing. You plead. You wait. You doubt—*maybe He doesn't care to listen to me, or maybe He isn't so powerful after all*. You quit asking—for days or months. You feel

guilty about doubting. You remember that God wants you to take your needs to Him, and you tell Him your requests again.

We may sometimes feel we're like the persistent widow in Jesus' parable recorded in Luke 18. She kept coming to the judge, badgering him and trying to wear him down so he'd give in. But we know that God is kinder and more powerful than the judge in the parable. We trust Him, for He is good and wise and sovereign. We remember that Jesus said we "should always pray and not give up" (v. 1).

So we ask Him, "Summon your power, God; show us your strength, our God, as you have done before" (PSALM 68:28). And then we trust Him . . . and wait. 🌿

Luke 18:1

Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

ANNE CETAS

Delay is not denial so keep praying.

 ⁶ “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you.

⁸ For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹ I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. ¹¹ I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

¹³ ¹⁴ “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.”

Notes

The Praying Patient

The obituary for Alan Nanninga, a man in my city, identified him as “foremost, a dedicated witness for Christ”. After a description of his family life and career, the article mentioned nearly a decade of declining health. It concluded by saying, “His hospital stays . . . earned him the honorary title of ‘The Praying Patient’ ” because of his ministry to other patients. Here was a man who, in his times of distress, reached out to pray for and with the people in need around him.

Hours before Judas betrayed Him, Jesus prayed for His disciples. “I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one” (JOHN 17:11). Knowing what was about to happen, Jesus looked beyond Himself to focus on His followers and friends.

During our times of illness and distress, we long for and need the prayers of others. How those prayers help and encourage us! But may we also, like our Lord, lift our eyes to pray for those around us who are in great need. 🙏

John 17:11

**Holy Father,
protect them by
the power of your
name, the name
you gave me, so
that they may be
one as we are one.**

DAVID MCCASLAND

Our troubles can fill our prayers with love and empathy for others.

TODAY'S BIBLE READING **Romans 6:1–11**

 ¹ What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—⁷because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Notes

A New Normal

After my doctor announced that I had cancer, I tried to listen to what he said, but I couldn't. I went home, pulled a blanket over my head and fell asleep on the couch, as if sleeping could change the diagnosis.

When I finally gained enough strength to tell my loved ones, my friend Judy Schreur said something especially memorable. After expressing her sympathy, she said, "This is what will happen. You will feel really bad for three days. Then you will get up, figure out what you have to do and get on with your life." Then she added, "I think it has to do with death, burial and resurrection."

At the time, I didn't believe it. I was sure that life as I knew it was over. Nothing would ever be the same. I couldn't imagine feeling normal again. But she was right. Three days later I woke up and realised I didn't feel quite so bad. And little by little, despite the physical misery of chemotherapy treatments, my emotional and spiritual condition improved significantly. I 'died' to my old reality and was 'raised' to a new normal.

Thankfully, God is in the business of resurrection. For those who have died in Christ, the death of one reality means resurrection to a new, glorious normal so that we can "live a new life" (ROMANS 6:4). 🌱

Romans 6:4

Just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

JULIE ACKERMAN LINK

To be "in Christ" is to share in His life, in His death and in His resurrection.

FOR YOUR WEEKEND

The Lord Is My Shepherd

One day as a young man named David was watching his sheep, the idea came to him that God was like a shepherd. He thought of the incessant care that sheep require—their helplessness and defenselessness. He recalled their foolish straying from safe paths and their constant need for a guide. He thought of the time and patience it took for them to trust him before they would follow. He remembered the times when he led them through danger and they huddled close at his heels. He pondered the fact that he must think for his sheep, fight for them, guard them and find their pasture and quiet pools. He remembered their bruises and scratches that he bound up, and he marvelled at how frequently he had to rescue them from harm. Yet not one of his sheep was aware of how well it was watched. Yes, he mused, God is very much like a good shepherd.

Ancient shepherds knew their sheep by name. They were acquainted with all their ways—their peculiarities, their characteristic marks, their tendencies. Back then, shepherds didn't drive their sheep; they led them. At the

shepherd's morning call—a distinctive sound—each flock would rise and follow its master to the feeding grounds. Even if two shepherds called their flocks at the same time and the sheep were together, they never followed the wrong shepherd. All day long the sheep followed their own shepherd as he searched the wilderness looking for grassy meadows and sheltered pools where his flock could feed and drink in peace.

At certain times of the year it became necessary to move the flocks deeper into the wilderness, a desolate wasteland where predators lurked. But the sheep were always well guarded. Shepherds carried a “rod” (a heavy club) on their belts and a shepherd's staff in their hands.

The staff had a crook that was used to free the sheep from dangerous places or to restrain them from wandering away. The club was a weapon to ward off beasts. David said: “When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth” (1 SAMUEL 17:34–35).

Throughout the day each shepherd stayed close to his sheep, watching them carefully and protecting them from the slightest harm. When one sheep strayed, the shepherd searched for it until it was found. Then he laid it across his shoulders and brought it back home. At the end of the day, each shepherd led his flock to the safety of the fold and slept across the gateway to protect them.

A good shepherd never left his sheep alone. They would have been lost without him. His presence was their assurance. It's this good shepherd that David may have thought about as he composed each line of Psalm 23.

**ANCIENT
SHEPHERDS KNEW
THEIR SHEEP BY
NAME. THEY WERE
ACQUAINTED
WITH ALL THEIR
WAYS.**

*The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
for ever.*

The Shepherd calls to us and listens for the slightest sounds of life. He hears the faintest cry. If He hears nothing at all, He will not give up or go away. When we turn to Him, He is there to greet us. He has been there all along. "The LORD is near to all who call on him" (PSALM 145:18). There is no deeper motivation in God than love. It is His nature to love; He can do no other, for "God is love" (1 JOHN 4:8).

Do you have some nameless grief? Some vague, sad pain? Some inexplicable ache in your heart? Come to Him who made your heart. Jesus said: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (MATTHEW 11:28-30).

Left to ourselves we would have nothing more than restlessness, driven by the realisation that there is something more to know and love. But God will not leave us to ourselves. According to Psalm 23:2, He makes us lie down in green pastures. He leads us beside quiet waters. The verbs suggest gentle persuasion—a shepherd patiently, persistently encouraging his sheep to the place where their hungers and thirsts will be met.

In David's day, "green pastures" were oases in the desert towards which shepherds led their thirsty flocks. Left to themselves, sheep would wander off into the wilderness and die. Experienced shepherds knew the terrain and urged their flocks towards familiar grasslands and streams where they could forage and feed, lie down and rest.

**HE MAKES US LIE
DOWN IN GREEN
PASTURES. HE
LEADS US BESIDE
QUIET WATERS.**

The picture here is not of sheep grazing and drinking, but at rest, lying down or stretched out. The verb *leads* suggests a slow and leisurely pace. The scene is one of quietness, peace, satisfaction and rest. The common practice of shepherds was to graze their flocks in rough pasture early in the morning, leading them to better grasses as the morning progressed, and then coming to a cool, shaded oasis for noontime rest.

The image of placid waters emphasises the concept of rest—the condition of having all our passions satisfied. Augustine, early Christian theologian and philosopher, cried out, "What will make me take my rest in You . . . so I can forget my restlessness and take hold of You, the one good thing in my life?" It all begins with God. "He makes me [causes me to] lie down in green pastures, he leads me

beside quiet waters” (PSALM 23:2). The Good Shepherd “calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice” (JOHN 10:3–4).

God makes the first move. He takes the initiative by calling us and leading us to a place of rest. It’s not because we’re seeking God; He is seeking us. Deep within us is a place for God. We were made for God and without His love we ache in loneliness and emptiness. He calls from deep space to our depths. David put it this way, “My heart says of you, ‘Seek his face!’ Your face, LORD, I will seek” (PSALM 27:8). God spoke to the depths of David’s heart, uttering His heart’s desire: “Seek My face.” And David responded, “I will seek your face, Lord.”

And so it is: God calls us—seeking us to seek Him—and our hearts long for Him. What are those green pastures and quiet waters to which God leads us? And where are they? What is the reality behind these metaphors? God Himself is our true pasture (JEREMIAH 50:7) and our pool of quiet water. He is our true nourishment, our living water. If we do not take Him in, we will starve.

There is a hunger in the human heart that nothing but God can satisfy. There is a thirst that no one but He can quench. “Do not work for food that spoils,” Jesus said, “but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. . . . I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (JOHN 6:27, 35).

But how do we ‘graze’ on God and ‘drink’ Him in? Once more we’re see symbolism. What do the metaphors mean? The process begins, as all relationships do, with a ‘meeting’. As David said: “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” (PSALM 42:1–2).

God is a real person. He is not a human invention, a concept, a theory or a projection of ourselves. He is

overwhelmingly alive—real beyond our wildest dreams.

Author A. W. Tozer wrote:

God is a Person and as such can be cultivated as any person can. God is a Person and in the depths of His mighty nature He thinks, wills, enjoys, feels, loves, desires, and suffers as any other person may. God is a Person and can be known in increasing degrees of intimacy as we prepare our hearts for the wonder of it.

That’s the reality, but it’s also the problem: are we willing to prepare ourselves to meet Him? He responds to the slightest approach, but we’re only as close as we want to be. “If . . . you seek the LORD your God, you will find him”, Moses promised, then added this proviso: “if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul” (DEUTERONOMY 4:29).

We don’t have to look very hard or very long for God. He’s only as far away as our hearts (ROMANS 10:8–9), but He will not intrude. He calls us but then waits for our answer. Our progress towards Him is determined by our desire to engage Him in a personal way—to know Him.

“In a crowd, it’s difficult to see God,” Augustine said. “This vision craves secret retirement.”

“Go into your room”, Jesus said, “close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen” (MATTHEW 6:6). He will meet you there. ☺

Adapted from *The Lord Is My Shepherd* by David Roper.
Find it at discoveryseries.org/hp952.

TODAY'S BIBLE READING **2 Corinthians 4:7–18**

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. ¹² So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

¹³ It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, ¹⁴ because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. ¹⁵ All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Notes

A Bubble Break

A young boy showered my husband, Carl, and me with bubbles as he came running by us. It was a light and fun moment on a difficult day. We had been visiting our brother-in-law in hospital and helping Carl's sister who was struggling and having trouble getting to her doctors' appointments. So as we took a break and walked along a seaside boardwalk we were feeling a bit overwhelmed by the needs of our family.

Then came the bubbles. Just bubbles blown at us whimsically by a little boy in the ocean breeze—but they had a special significance to me. I love bubbles and keep a bottle in my office to use whenever I need the smile of a bubble break. Those bubbles and the vast Atlantic Ocean reminded me of what I can count on: God is always close. He is powerful. He always cares. And He can use even the smallest experiences, and briefest moments, to help us remember that His presence is like an ocean of grace in the middle of our heavy moments.

Maybe one day our troubles will seem like bubbles—momentary in light of eternity for “the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever”

(2 CORINTHIANS 4:18 NKJV). 🌀

2 Corinthians 4:18

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen.

ANNE CETAS

Jesus provides an oasis of grace in the desert of trials.

TODAY'S BIBLE READING **Isaiah 43:1–4**

 ¹ But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. ² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. ³ For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. ⁴ Since you are precious and honoured in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life.”

Notes

Fear Not

My wife became seriously ill during her pregnancy with our second child. As the doctors struggled to find the problem, she continued to grow weaker—dangerously so.

Watching her suffer was a helpless and horrible feeling for me, and there were days when it felt as if God were not hearing our prayers. One Sunday, while I was looking for comfort from Scripture, my eyes landed on the first verse in Isaiah 43.

“Do not fear” it begins, and ends with “you are mine”. Instantly, the Holy Spirit made the words personal. The intimate way God addresses Israel reminded me of His always-present attention to us too: “When you pass through the waters . . . through the rivers . . . through the fire” (v.2). Each phrase rose up in crescendo, from the pages to my heart.

Our comfort in that hour came not from promises of healing or miracles, but from knowing we were never alone. We had many other frightening times, including just after Ethan’s birth, when it looked as if both he and Cheryl would be lost. But God had used His words to comfort us and prepare us for those harder moments.

Let these words be a reminder to you that you are never alone.



RANDY KILGORE

Isaiah 43:1

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

Never forget in the darkness, what you know to be true in the light.

-  ¹ Praise the LORD, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
- ² Praise the LORD, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
- ³ who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases.
- ⁴ who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
- ⁵ who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- ⁶ The LORD works righteousness
and justice for all the oppressed.
- ⁷ He made known his ways to Moses,
his deeds to the people of Israel:
- ⁸ the LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.
- ⁹ He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbour his anger for ever;
- ¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
- ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
- ¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
- ¹³ As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;
- ¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.

Notes

Hopeful Praise

One of my friends was in tears on a beautiful summer day, unable to deal with life's difficulties. Another could not look beyond the life altering sadnesses of her past. Still another struggled with the closing of the small church he had pastored faithfully. A fourth friend had lost his job at a local ministry.

What can our struggling friends—or any of us—do to find hope? Where do we turn when tomorrow offers no happy promises?

We can praise the Lord, as David said in Psalm 103. In the middle of trouble, acknowledging God's role in our lives can redirect our thinking from the hurts of our hearts and force us to dwell instead on the greatness of God. David knew trouble. He faced the threat of enemies, the consequences of his own sin and the challenges of sorrow. Yet he also recognised the healing power of praise.

That's why in Psalm 103 he can list reasons to turn our attention to God, who gives us many benefits: He forgives us, heals us, redeems us, crowns us with love and tender mercies, fills our life with good things and renews us. David reminds us that God provides justice and righteousness, and He is gracious and loving.

Take it from David: praising God's greatness puts hope in our troubled hearts. 🌿

Psalm 103:2

Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

DAVE BRANON

Praise can lighten your heaviest burden.

TODAY'S BIBLE READING **Matthew 20:20–28**

²⁰ Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favour of him.

²¹ "What is it you want?" he asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

²² "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"

"We can," they answered.

²³ Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

²⁴ When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. ²⁵ Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Notes

Witness From A Wheelchair

A woman named Nancy put this ad in her local newspaper: "If you are lonely or have a problem, call me. I am in a wheelchair and seldom get out. We can share our problems with each other. Just call. I'd love to talk." The response to that ad was surprising—30 calls or more every week.

What motivated this woman to reach out from her wheelchair to help others in need? Nancy explained that before her paralysis she had been perfectly healthy but in deep despair. She had tried to commit suicide by jumping from her window, but her fall left her paralysed from the waist down.

In the hospital, utterly frustrated, she sensed that Jesus said, "Nancy, you've had a healthy body but a crippled soul. From now on you will have a crippled body but a healthy soul." As a result of that experience, she surrendered her life to Christ. When she was finally allowed to go home, she prayed for a way to share God's grace with others, and the idea of the newspaper ad occurred to her.

Every believer can do something to help others. Limited as we may be by sickness, old age or other difficulties, we can still pray, call or write. No matter what our condition, God can use us. 🌱

Matthew 20:28

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.

VERNON GROUNDS

God can use us in small ways to accomplish great things.

¹ Now a man named Lazarus was ill. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay ill, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is ill.”

⁴ When he heard this, Jesus said, “This illness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” ⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was two more days, ⁷ and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”

⁸ ‘But Rabbi,’ they said, ‘a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?’

⁹ Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the day-time will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light. ¹⁰ It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.”

¹¹ After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”

¹² His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.”

¹³ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

¹⁴ So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

Notes

Silence And Trust

In one of Joe Morgenstern's weekly *Wall Street Journal* columns about movies, he considered the impact of the great film stars in close-up scenes where they said nothing at all. "Movie stars", he wrote, "can do as little as they do at crucial moments because, having already earned our respect, they can assume that we're paying attention." This quality of powerful silence that we admire in actors and actresses, however, can be frustrating or disappointing in our relationship with God when He is silent.

When Lazarus, a close friend of Jesus, became seriously ill, his sisters Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus. But "when [Jesus] heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was for two more days" (JOHN 11:6).

Commenting on this passage, Oswald Chambers said: "Has God trusted you with a silence—a silence that is big with meaning? . . . Think of those days of absolute silence in the home at Bethany! Is there anything analogous to those days in your life? . . . His silence is the sign that He is bringing you into a marvellous understanding of Himself. . . . If God has given you a silence, praise Him, He is bringing you into the great run of His purposes."

We can trust our loving Lord, even when He is silent. 🌿

DAVID MCCASLAND

John 11:6

When [Jesus] heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was two more days.

True trust in God stays strong even when He is silent.

FOR YOUR WEEKEND

The Comfort OF Knowing God

“How come there are so many more stars in Africa than at home?” That was my question to a friend I was visiting in Burkina Faso a number of years ago. I had never seen an abundance of stars like I saw that night. The black sky was full of pinpoints of light in an amazing display.

Her answer was simple as she explained that I had never before been where it was so dark. Where I live, there are so many other lights that compete with the light of the stars that many of them are not visible. In the absolute darkness of an African night, with no nearby city lights to diminish the darkness, the stars shine unhindered. I have thought of that often since then when I have found myself in the dark times of my life—when I have been where it was so dark. And it was against that dark backdrop that I was able to see more details of God’s character and nature than ever before.

In the brightness of good times we often miss some of the most wonderful and intimate details of God, but against the blackness of suffering we see pinpoints of light that we never noticed before. And they are beautiful to behold. The

great preacher Charles Spurgeon said, “God’s people have always found out the best of their God when in the worst of conditions.”

Job is a perfect illustration of this. Job’s name is synonymous with suffering, and his story can hardly be equalled. Yet after all he endured, Job was able to declare: “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you” (JOB 42:5). Now, in the midst of this suffering—against the backdrop of this very black sky—my eyes have seen You, Lord. Now I don’t just know about You, I know You! Through suffering, God shattered Job’s theology to allow Job to see His reality. That can be our experience too. I am convinced that if we will look past the pain of what we’re experiencing, we can see God in our own story of suffering as well.

GREAT IS HIS FAITHFULNESS

What are some specific aspects of God’s character that we learn to know through suffering? A couple stand out to me as the ‘brightest stars’ of the night. My husband, Peter, and I chose the hymn “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” to be sung at our wedding. We chose it as a testimony to God’s faithfulness in our individual lives that had brought us to this amazing moment. It was our song of triumph—or so we thought. Little did we realise that it would become the theme of the first years of our marriage as we faced unbelievably trying and difficult circumstances.

I had read Jeremiah’s declaration of God’s faithfulness in Lamentations 3:23 many times before, but had never really focused on the context of his words. Was the prophet having one of those great days and just couldn’t help but break into praise for God’s great faithfulness? It seems logical to think that he made this statement when the faithfulness of God was especially evident and when life was daily proof of the goodness and faithfulness of a loving heavenly Father. But

that was not the case at all. Jeremiah's surroundings at the time that he declared this truth about his God gave little evidence of God's great faithfulness.

Instead, Jeremiah was in the midst of deep personal and national suffering. For me, Jeremiah's circumstances add strength to his words. These are not the words of a man coming up with a nice saying for a future hymn writer to put to music. They are not words meant to be an easy Christian slogan to be hung on our walls or embroidered on our pillows. These words were the heart cry of a man in the worst of surroundings who was declaring what he knew to be true about his God, even in the midst of the darkness of his circumstances.

This was also the testimony of the psalmist. In Psalm 89:8 he exclaims, "Who is like you, LORD God Almighty? You, LORD, are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you." This same thought is expressed in a favourite verse of mine found in Isaiah 11:5 where the writer gives us a wonderful picture of God's faithfulness surrounding him when he says, "Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist."

What made this verse especially meaningful to me was my own experience with a sash. I had three children of preschool age at the same time, which made every shopping trip an adventure. In fact, if food hadn't been a necessity, I might have given up supermarket shopping altogether! How do you manage two toddlers and an infant who still needs to be carried—especially in a busy car park? My solution was my coat. I purposely bought a coat that had a sash around the waist. Debbie and Danny had strict instructions that they

**"BECAUSE OF
THE LORD'S
GREAT LOVE
WE ARE NOT
CONSUMED, FOR
HIS COMPASSIONS
NEVER FAIL."**

were each to hold on to an end of that sash (with threat of dire consequences if they let go) while I carried Steven. My children knew that I followed through with “dire consequences”, so they obeyed and were safe.

It was when walking through a frightening time of life that I first discovered the assurance that I could cling to *His* faithfulness and be safe. . . . The verse God gave me was Isaiah 11:5: “Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.” Instantly, to my mind came the image of my children hanging on to my sash. I was now the child, and I was walking through a scary place. But I held on tightly to God’s faithfulness and, just as my sash had kept my children safe, His sash of faithfulness kept me safe.

A LOVE THAT WILL NOT FAIL

Jeremiah, in his time of deep distress, also points us to another star that shone brightly against his dark sky of suffering. In Lamentations 3:21–22 he declares, “Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.” Jeremiah placed his hope in the truth of God’s unfailing love.

I love the fact that in Scripture those two words, *unfailing* and *love*, are so frequently linked together. . . . God repeatedly assures us that His love will never fail. Jeremiah’s words are more than just the record of one man’s suffering. They are the inspired truth of God and are there to teach us about this same God in the dark times in our own lives. God is faithful and His love will never fail. This is as true today as it was for Jeremiah centuries ago.

Recently Peter came in to where I was working to clarify something he had said to me earlier. As he was leaving, I said, “You don’t need to explain yourself to me; I know your heart.” And I do. I have utmost confidence in his motives, especially towards me. That’s the very attitude that God

wants us to have towards Him—confidence in His heart and in His unfailing love. Suffering is often a time when we learn to know the heart of God. We learn to have utmost confidence in His motives towards us and in His desire for our best. God asks us to trust His heart, even when we don't understand His ways.

Years ago my sister's little boy, Jeffrey, died. He had been born with many physical difficulties, requiring multiple complicated surgeries. He had responded remarkably well to them, and we were all encouraged. But one night, with no warning, his liver failed, and we received the unexpected and devastating call that he had died. What a confusing time! We had believed that God was intervening for Jeffrey and had been so hopeful that he would make it. We had even seen God work out some amazing details on behalf of this precious little boy. And then he died.

At the time of Jeffrey's death, God gave me these words—an expression of my heart in response to events and circumstances that didn't make any sense. They were written as a testimony of the pinpoint of light that I saw in this dark time.

Dear God, your hand has moved in ways I cannot comprehend. I do not understand at all the sorrow that you send. But Lord, your Word reminds me that now I know in part. Until the day I know in full, Lord, let me trust your heart.

Recently a friend related this story about a colleague of his who suffered for a time from serious depression. Matt was a popular professor who'd had great impact on the lives of many young people preparing for ministry. How could this be happening? And where was God? As he asked these hard questions, Matt suddenly sensed the quiet presence of God and this calm assurance, "Look at my eyes, not at my hands." In that moment he felt absolute confidence in the love of his Father. He still didn't understand what God's

hands were doing in his life, but he trusted the love that he saw in God's eyes.

God doesn't always give us answers, but He promises us a love that will never, never fail. We can see it in His eyes and can hear it in His voice. Listen to the words of Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." This verse is often quoted, but its familiarity doesn't diminish the hope it offers as God gives us a peek into His compassionate heart. How many times in suffering do we find ourselves without hope? How many times do we look ahead with fear to an unknown future? God was speaking these words specifically to the nation of Israel, but we know that He never changes. The heart that He revealed to His children then is the same heart that He has towards us now. Notice that this verse does not promise that everything will be wonderful. It doesn't promise that we'll understand all of God's purposes. It does, however, give us absolute assurance that God knows what He's doing and that what He is doing is for our best. 🌱

Excerpted from *The Sweet Side of Suffering* by M. Esther Lovejoy.
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TODAY'S BIBLE READING **John 9:24–34**

²⁴ A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.”

²⁵ He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”

²⁶ Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

²⁷ He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?”

²⁸ Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses! ²⁹ We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from.”

³⁰ The man answered, “Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. ³² Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

³⁴ To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.

Notes

A Glimpse of God's Love

Nadine was in the last stages of cancer when I met her. The doctor said chemotherapy would no longer help. She was a dedicated Christian and had a wonderful peace from God. She spent her last weeks making scrapbooks for her adult daughters and planning her memorial service.

Nadine's joyful spirit was inviting to be around, and people looked forward to spending time with her. She kept her sense of humour and always shared the ways that the Lord was meeting her needs. She gave everyone around her a glimpse of God's loving character.

When a man who had been born blind was healed by Jesus, he too had the opportunity to show others a glimpse of who God is (JOHN 9:1–41). Neighbours asked, "How then were your eyes opened?" (v. 10). He told them about Jesus. When Pharisees questioned him, he told them how Jesus had given him sight, and concluded, "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (v. 33).

We may wonder how we can show others what God is like. God can be clearly seen in the way we handle life's difficulties, such as problems at work or home, or perhaps a serious illness. We can share with others how He is comforting us—and let them know that the Lord cares for them too.

Who in your life needs to see the love of God?  ANNE CETAS

John 9:24

Give glory to God.

You can be a glimpse of God's love to someone.

 ³⁰ The apostles gathered round Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

³² So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³ But many who saw them leaving recognised them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

Notes

Musical Interludes

God writes the music for our lives. Our role is to follow His lead—humming, harmonising, blending and singing in tune.

Serving the Lord, like singing, can be stirring and rewarding. But when we are set aside by illness, the interludes can be frustrating and unfulfilling. When God says to us “get some rest” (MARK 6:31), we may not want to stop. It seems that our performance is over, that we’ve come to the end of our song.

If we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed with our inactivity, it will cause us to focus on our defects and our circumstances. But we need to remind ourselves that the Lord may be using our time of rest to make our music better.

The Great Conductor is counting time with precision. There is more to the arrangement than we know. If we keep our eyes on Him, in time He’ll enable us to chime in again.

In the meantime we can enjoy the rest. The quiet times are opportunities to quiet our souls and compose ourselves for the measures that lie ahead. The rest is not a mistake, nor an omission, but a necessary part of the symphony God wrote in the beginning and is conducting for us every day.

The Conductor knows best. Wait on Him. 🎧 DAVID ROPER

Mark 6:31

[Jesus] said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

God uses life's stops to prepare us for the next start.

- 
- ¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.
His love endures for ever.
- ² Give thanks to the God of gods.
His love endures for ever.
- ³ Give thanks to the Lord of lords.
His love endures for ever.
- ⁴ to him who alone does great wonders,
His love endures for ever.
- ⁵ who by his understanding made the heavens,
His love endures for ever.
- ⁶ who spread out the earth upon the waters,
His love endures for ever.
- ⁷ who made the great lights—
His love endures for ever.
- ⁸ the sun to govern the day,
His love endures for ever.
- ⁹ the moon and stars to govern the night.
His love endures for ever.

Notes

Forever Love

We don't have to live very long in this world before it becomes painfully clear that nothing lasts forever. The car we were so proud of when we bought it is spending too much time in the garage getting fixed. Those clothes we picked up on sale are now in the hand-me-down box. At home, the roof eventually leaks, the appliances break down, the carpet needs to be replaced. And relationships we think will endure often fall apart.

Nothing lasts forever—nothing but God's love, that is. Twenty-six times we are reminded of this inspiring truth in Psalm 136. Twenty-six times the writer gives us something for which to praise the Lord, and then he reminds us, "his love endures for ever".

Think of what this means. When we sin and need forgiveness, His love endures forever. When our lives seem a jumbled mess that we can't control, His love endures forever. When we can't find anyone to turn to for help, God's love endures forever. When each day is a struggle because of illness, despair or conflict, His love endures forever. Whenever life seems overwhelming, we can still praise the Lord, as the psalmist did—for God's love is always new and fresh.

No problem can outlast God's forever love! 🌟

DAVE BRANON

Psalm 136:1

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. His love endures for ever.

God's heart is always overflowing with love.

TODAY'S BIBLE READING **Psalm 13**

- 
- ¹ How long, LORD? Will you forget me for ever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
- ² How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?
- ³ Look on me and answer, LORD my God.
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,
- ⁴ and my enemy will say, 'I have overcome him,'
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.
- ⁵ But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
- ⁶ I will sing the LORD's praise,
for he has been good to me.

Notes

Don't Forget Me, Lord!

Do you ever wonder if the Lord has forgotten you? Does it seem as if He's not paying as much attention to you as He once did? I've felt that way at times. But appearances can be deceiving. Regardless of how it looks right now, the Lord is not far from us. He may be giving us an opportunity to trust Him and wait for His help rather than rely on our own resources.

We are all familiar with a similar kind of testing in everyday life. What parent has not told their child to stay in a certain place until they return? And what parent is not distressed if that same child is unwilling to wait but quickly runs off on their own?

David, the author of Psalm 13, reflected the thoughts of a child of God who certainly must have pleased the heavenly Father. He was being put to the test. He knew the experience of feeling that he had been abandoned by the Lord. Yet he remained convinced that his only real hope was in God, and that He would reward his faith.

Are you being tested right now? Does God seem far away? It's an opportunity to learn what David learned—that the Lord never leaves us. He sustains all who put their trust in Him. 🙏

Psalm 13:1

**How long, LORD?
Will you forget me
for ever?**

MART DEHAAN

He who abandons himself to God will never be abandoned by God.

-  ¹ Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me,
for in you I take refuge.
I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings
until the disaster has passed.
- ² I cry out to God Most High,
to God, who vindicates me.
- ³ He sends from heaven and saves me,
rebuking those who hotly pursue me—
God sends forth his love and his faithfulness.
- ⁴ I am in the midst of lions;
I am forced to dwell among ravenous beasts—
men whose teeth are spears and arrows,
whose tongues are sharp swords.
- ⁵ Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
let your glory be over all the earth.
- ⁶ They spread a net for my feet—
I was bowed down in distress.
They dug a pit in my path—
but they have fallen into it themselves.
- ⁷ My heart, O God, is steadfast,
my heart is steadfast;
I will sing and make music.
- ⁸ Awake, my soul!
Awake, harp and lyre!
I will awaken the dawn.
- ⁹ I will praise you, Lord, among the nations;
I will sing of you among the peoples.
- ¹⁰ For great is your love, reaching to the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches to the skies.
- ¹¹ Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens;
Let your glory be over all the earth.

Notes

Our Place of Refuge

I t is believed that David wrote Psalm 57 while fleeing from King Saul, who had hatred in his heart for the former shepherd boy. David ducked into a cave and barely escaped his pursuer. He was safe temporarily, but the threat was still there.

We've all been there. Maybe not in a cave, but pursued by something that strikes fear into our hearts. Perhaps it is the deep sorrow that follows the death of someone we love. Maybe it's the fear of an unknown future. Or it could be an oppressive physical illness that won't go away.

In such circumstances, God does not always remove the difficulty, but He is present to help us. We wish that He would swoop in and whisk us to safety—just as David may have wished for a quick end to Saul's pursuit. We plead with God to stop the pain and make the road to tomorrow smooth and straight. We beg Him to eliminate our struggle. But the difficulty remains. It is then that we can find a refuge in God as David did. While hiding in that cave, he said, "I take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed" (PSALM 57:1).

Are you in the middle of trouble? You'll find refuge in the Most High God. 🕊

Psalm 57:1

**I will take refuge
in the shadow of
your wings until the
disaster has passed.**

DAVE BRANON

We learn the lesson of trust in the school of trial.

FOR YOUR WEEKEND

The Wonder OF His Names

Names are important. Before our children are born, we spend months thinking about—sometimes agonising about—what to name them. We envision possible nicknames, whether or not the initials will be okay, if the name will sound too grown-up for a child or too childish for a grown-up. We don't want to pick a name that's too old-fashioned, but neither do we want a name that everyone else is choosing. . . .

God the Father also chose the names for His child, and each one has great significance. Centuries before Christ was born, the prophet Isaiah announced God's choice of names for His Son. As he declares in that wonderful and familiar passage, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given . . . And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (ISAIAH 9:6). The wonder of these names is that they are not just what the Son of God is called, they're who He is. They are a description of His character and a revelation of His nature. They also point us clearly to His sufficiency for whatever we may be facing.

A WISE AND WONDERFUL COUNSELLOR

First of all, God chose to name His Son Wonderful Counsellor. One of our greatest needs in a time of suffering is for counsel. Our own judgement is often impaired by our emotions. We are too close to be objective and too weary to be wise. Human counsellors, as helpful as they can be in many instances, are also limited. They don't know the hidden places in our hearts; they don't know the depths of our pain. They only know what we allow them to hear and see. How comforting to know that God Himself is available as our counsellor—One who knows our innermost thoughts and feelings, who knows our circumstances, who knows what truly is best and who knows how it will all end. He assures us, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you" (PSALM 32:8). . . .

He also chose the name of Mighty God. I like another version of that name used in Scripture—Almighty God. He's not just mighty, He is all-mighty! I like the reminder that His power and might are limitless. So often in our suffering we face situations for which we truly need an Almighty God. We face problems that are way beyond the scope of human help. We face needs that can't be met by even the most loving friend. We need a powerful and mighty advocate who can do the impossible. For everything for which we need a God, His might and power are sufficient.

Throughout Scripture God clearly reminds us of His power and might. Consider this exchange between the prophet Jeremiah and God. Jeremiah prays, "Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you" (JEREMIAH 32:17). He acknowledges that a look at creation is more than enough evidence that God can do anything. His

prayer then goes on to declare God's might and power, but finishes with some concerns about what God was asking of him personally.

God responds by first stating that He is not only the God of creation, but also the God of all mankind (Jeremiah included). Then He asks, "Is anything too hard for me?" (JEREMIAH 32:27). I suspect that was a rhetorical question as God gently reminds Jeremiah of his own words. He is God and nothing is too hard for Him.

Valerie's story is one with the fingerprints of the Almighty God all over it. When she and her husband became the proud parents of a healthy baby boy they anticipated the joys of going from being a couple to becoming a family. However, shortly after she gave birth, Valerie's body suddenly shut down. The anxious hours that followed brought little hope. The prognosis was dismal, and the doctors offered little

encouragement. They determined that if she survived, her only hope would be a heart transplant. Also, the trauma to her body had destroyed her sight.

Immediately the call went out for prayer, and immediately the family of God responded. Even those of us who didn't know Valerie and Matt personally shared their anguish. One day my son, who was their pastor, went in to see Valerie and found her totally unresponsive as usual. Two days later he returned to find her sitting in a chair, with her husband and newborn baby nearby. (She had not remembered being pregnant so was rather surprised to find out that she had a baby.) Today as I write this, Valerie continues to improve. Her sight is returning, and the doctors say that her

**"BUT THERE IS
A GOD IN
HEAVEN,"
AND HE BEARS
THE NAME OF
ALMIGHTY!**

heart has healed and strengthened so that they no longer anticipate the need for a transplant.

This is the work of the Almighty God! In this day and age amazing things can be done medically, but even modern medicine has its limits. There are times, such as with Valerie, when there simply aren't human answers or solutions. "But there is a God in heaven," and He bears the name of Almighty!

A FOREVER FATHER

The next name given to Jesus is one that is especially meaningful to me. Imagine a child—a baby—being given the name Everlasting Father. But through this name God was communicating the amazing truth that this child would not just be His Son and bear His name; He would also be Him in all His fullness. This was not to be a miniature God or a copy of God; this baby would be "in very nature God" (PHILIPPIANS 2:6), and God's nature and heart is that of an Everlasting Father.

For me this name has great significance because of my earthly father. I brought to him all my hurts, all my broken things, all my fears and problems with the confidence that he loved me and that I had every right to come to him. There is One waiting with open arms who will always welcome you as my father welcomed me. He will not fail you. He will not push you away. He will listen and love and care and provide. And He can heal and comfort with more love than any of us can fathom. Go to your eternal Father in confidence in the wonderful name of His own Son.

A SOURCE OF PEACE THAT GUIDES AND GUARDS

Our times of heartache and pain produce many emotions, but peace is not one of them. We may experience gripping fear, overwhelming discouragement, bitter anger or deep grief. All of these negate peace. Peace is not a natural by-product of

suffering. It can be, however, a supernatural by-product because of the One named the Prince of Peace, the final name given prophetically to Christ in Isaiah 9:6.

How can you find peace when everything around you is falling apart, when all of your life is in turmoil, when you are in the midst of pain? The answer to each of these is the same. We can only find peace through finding its source—the wonderful Prince of Peace. . . .

One of my closest friends has recently faced something uncertain and frightening. Some weeks ago both of Kathy's parents disappeared. Under the best of circumstances that is horrifying news, but Kathy's parents aren't in the best of circumstances.

Kathy's mother has diabetes, and they both suffer from Alzheimer's. As is sometimes typical of people with Alzheimer's, Kathy's mother is given to bouts of rage. In one of those moments she pushed their carer out of the car, grabbed the keys and took off with Kathy's father.

There has been an intense search in an attempt to find them. During these weeks Kathy has dealt with the many emotions normal at a time like this. But the predominate emotion that is evident in Kathy as she walks through these frightening days is one of peace. She is not looking down, but keeping her eyes focused on her Guide over these very troubled waters.

Two pictures of peace in Scripture have helped me many times. First, Paul urges the believers at Colosse to "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" (COLOSSIANS 3:15). Then he assures the Christians at Philippi that "the peace of God,

**THOSE FEARFUL
THOUGHTS,
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BY PEACE.**

which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (PHILIPPIANS 4:7).

In the first picture, Paul encourages us to let God’s peace rule in every circumstance, to let His peace be sovereign over all the other emotions. The second picture is that of peace standing guard at the door of our hearts and minds. Those fearful thoughts, those bitter, angry feelings, are stopped at the entrance by peace.

Notice two important things that Paul mentions about this peace. First, it “transcends all understanding”. There is nothing logical about it. It is offered to us when it is the most illogical of all emotions to have at that time. Second, it is found “in Christ Jesus”. We can’t conjure this up or will it into being. There is a source, and it is the Prince of Peace Himself.

THE POWER OF HIS NAMES

Think of how meaningful each of those names is for our times of suffering. But even more, think of how meaningful all of those names are together. I love the wholeness of our God, who gave His Son each of those names so that together they would show us a picture of His glorious sufficiency.

Imagine if He were a loving father with no wisdom. Or what if He were loving and wise, but had no power to accomplish what His love desired and His wisdom knew to be best. We can rest in His peace because we know that He is all wise, all loving and all mighty. What a perfect God!

What a difference it makes in prayer as we come to the Father in these names that He chose for His own Son. And we find that there is a power in these names that minister to us at the deepest point of our need. 🌟

Excerpted from *The Sweet Side of Suffering* by M. Esther Lovejoy.
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TODAY'S BIBLE READING **1 Corinthians 15:51–58**

 ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?”

⁵⁶ he sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

Notes

What Cancer Can't Do

One of the most dreaded sentences a patient can hear is, "You have cancer." These words bring a chill to the heart. Although great progress is being made in treating this disease, recovery can be long and painful.

An enthusiastic believer in Christ, Dan Richardson, lost his battle with cancer. But his life demonstrated that even though the physical body may be destroyed by disease, the spirit can remain triumphant. This poem was distributed at his memorial service:

1 Corinthians 15:57

**Thanks be to God!
He gives us the
victory through our
Lord Jesus Christ.**

Cancer is so limited . . .
It cannot cripple love, it cannot shatter hope,
It cannot corrode faith, it cannot eat away peace,
It cannot destroy confidence, it cannot kill friendship,
It cannot shut out memories, it cannot silence courage,
It cannot invade the soul, it cannot reduce eternal life,
It cannot quench the Spirit,
It cannot lessen the power of the resurrection.

If an incurable disease invades our life, we can refuse to let it touch our spirit. Our body can be severely afflicted, and we may have a great struggle. But if we keep trusting God's love, our spirit will remain strong. 🌿

DAVE EGNER

Our greatest enemy is not disease, but despair.

TODAY'S BIBLE READING **Matthew 28:16–20**

 ¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Notes

In All Kinds of Weather

When Jesus sent His disciples out, He gave them this promise: “I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (MATTHEW 28:20). Literally, the word *always* means “all the days”.

Jesus didn't simply say, “always”, but “all the days”. That takes into account all our various activities, the good and bad circumstances surrounding us, the varied responsibilities we have through the course of our days, the storm clouds and the sunshine.

Our Lord is present with us no matter what each day brings. It may be a day of joy or of sadness, of sickness or of health, of success or of failure. No matter what happens to us today, our Lord is walking beside us, strengthening us, loving us, filling us with faith, hope and love. As He envelops us with quiet serenity and security, our foes, fears, afflictions and doubts begin to recede. We can bear up in any setting and circumstance because we know the Lord is at hand, just as He told Paul in Acts 18:10, “I am with you”.

We can practise God's presence by stopping in the midst of our stressful days to remind ourselves: the Lord is here. Let's pray that we will see Him who is invisible—and see Him everywhere. 🌿

Matthew 28:20

**I am with you
always, to the very
end of the age.**

DAVID ROPER

Seek the LORD while you can find him. Call on him now while he is near.

ISAIAH 55:6

TODAY'S BIBLE READING **Psalm 131**

 ¹ My heart is not proud, LORD,
my eyes are not haughty;
I do not concern myself with great matters
or things too wonderful for me.
² But I have calmed and quietened myself,
I am like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child I am content.
³ Israel, put your hope in the LORD
both now and for evermore.

Notes

Why Me?

Recently I read Psalm 131, one of my favourite psalms. In the past, I viewed it as an encouragement to understand that mystery is one of the hallmarks of God's character. It challenged me to let my mind be at rest, since I am unable to understand all that God is doing in His universe.

But then I saw another side of David's calm spirit: I am unable to understand all that God is doing in me, and it is impossible to try.

David draws a comparison between a weaned child that no longer frets for what it once demanded, and a soul that has learned the same lesson. It is a call to learn humility, patient endurance, and contentment in all my circumstances—whatever they are—though I do not understand God's reasons. Divine logic is beyond the grasp of my mind.

I ask, "Why this affliction? Why this anguish?" The Father answers, "Hush, child. You wouldn't understand if I explained it to you. Just trust Me!"

So, I turn from contemplating David's example to ask myself: can I, in my circumstances, "hope in the LORD"? (v. 3). Can I wait in faith and patience without fretting and without questioning God's wisdom? Can I trust Him while He works in me His good, acceptable and perfect will? 🌿

Deuteronomy 29:29

The secret things belong to the LORD our God.

DAVID ROPER

In a world of mystery, it's a comfort to know the God who knows all things.

 ¹ I cry aloud to the LORD;
I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy.

² I pour out before him my complaint;
before him I tell my trouble.

³ When my spirit grows faint within me,
it is you who watch over my way.
In the path where I walk
people have hidden a snare for me.

⁴ Look and see, there is no one at my right hand;
no one is concerned for me.
I have no refuge;
no one cares for my life.

⁵ I cry to you, LORD;
I say, "You are my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living."

⁶ Listen to my cry,
for I am in desperate need;
rescue me from those who pursue me,
for they are too strong for me.

⁷ Set me free from my prison,
that I may praise your name.
Then the righteous will gather about me
because of your goodness to me.

Notes

Cries of Desperation

They can break your heart. They remind me of the words of the psalmist: “When my spirit grows faint within me...no one is concerned for me” (PSALM 142:3-4).

I’m talking about letters we receive here at Our Daily Bread Ministries. They come from brokenhearted people who ask us to pray for them as they struggle through life.

“I have suffered nervous breakdowns and heart problems,” says one person. “I try so very hard to accept God’s will in my life.”

A mother writes, “I’m so burdened for my daughter. She’s backslidden, and I wonder if she was ever really born again.”

And yet another says, “I just had a cancer test, and next week I have a brain scan.”

In Psalm 142, David was praying for deliverance from his powerful enemies. Although our situations may be far different, we can learn from him as we pray for help against the destructive forces we face in life. We can learn that God is always there to listen (v. 1), that He knows our situation (v. 3) and that He is our refuge (v. 5).

What is our pressing need today? We can cry out to God, lean on Him completely and wait for His help. Then, like the psalmist, we too can praise God’s holy name (v. 7). 🙏 DAVE BRANON

Psalm 142:6**Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need.**

Your problems can never exhaust God’s provisions.

- 
- ¹¹ Come, my children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
- ¹² Whoever of you loves life
and desires to see many good days,
- ¹³ keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from telling lies.
- ¹⁴ Turn from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.
- ¹⁵ The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
and his ears are attentive to their cry;
- ¹⁶ but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to blot out their name from the earth.
- ¹⁷ The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them;
he delivers them from all their troubles.
- ¹⁸ The LORD is close to the broken-hearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Notes

Something's Wrong

The morning after our son, Allen, was born, the doctor sat down in a chair near the foot of my bed and said, "Something's wrong." Our son, so perfect on the outside, had a life-threatening birth defect and needed to be flown to a hospital 700 miles away for immediate surgery.

When the doctor tells you something is wrong with your child, your life changes. Fear of what lies ahead can crush your spirit and you stumble along, desperate for a God who will strengthen you so you can support your child.

Would a loving God allow this? you wonder. Does He care about my child? Is He there? These and other thoughts shook my faith that morning.

Then my husband, Hiram, arrived and heard the news. After the doctor left, Hiram said, "Jolene, let's pray." I nodded and he took my hand. "Thank You, Father, for giving Allen to us. He's Yours, God, not ours. You loved him before we knew him, and he belongs to You. Be with him when we can't. Amen."

Hiram has always been a man of few words. He struggles to speak his thoughts and often doesn't try, knowing that I have enough words to fill any silence. But on a day when my heart was broken, my spirit crushed and my faith gone, God gave Hiram strength to speak the words I couldn't say. And clinging to my husband's hand, in deep silence and through many tears, I sensed that God was very near. 🌿

Psalm 34:18

The LORD is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

JOLENE PHILO

God is always near in spite of our fears.

FOR YOUR WEEKEND

Knowing Who

WHEN WE DON'T KNOW WHY

Sometimes suffering seems endless and we find ourselves weary of waiting. A verse that I love and have clung to many times is Isaiah 60:22: “I am the LORD; in its time I will do this swiftly.” What a great reminder that God will not delay, nor will He be rushed. While we are wearily waiting, He is working in ways we can’t see or know. So our trust is based on God’s own assurance that when the time is right, He won’t make us wait any longer. We can draw from God’s supply of trust so that we can wait with a patient, quiet heart for Him to work in His time and His way.

Suffering is often a confusing time spiritually. Why doesn’t God heal when He can? Why did God allow this to happen? Why doesn’t God change my circumstances? We are often baffled and confused by what we perceive to be God’s actions, or lack of action, on our behalf. Whatever the specific question, it comes down to one agonising word: *why*?

We may never know the “whys”, but we can know the “Who”. We can begin to know in a deeply personal way the truths about God’s phenomenal nature—His unfailing love,

His great faithfulness. And through this knowledge we find, just as Peter promised, unlimited grace and peace.

Our greatest need is not good health or success; it's a relationship with the Lord. A personal relationship with Him begins at the moment of salvation. When we are born spiritually into God's family, we become members of His spiritual kingdom.

We come into this world separated from the life of God and absorbed with an interest in finding satisfaction and significance on our own terms. The Bible says we all come into this world physically alive but spiritually dead. The apostle Paul wrote, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (ROMANS 3:23), and "the wages of sin is death" (ROMANS 6:23).

But the good news is that God Himself loved us enough to send His own Son Jesus into this world to rescue us from our sin. He lived the perfect life and then to solve the problem of our lost relationship with His Father, Jesus died in our place, offering Himself as a perfect

sacrifice to pay the price of sin. When He rose from the dead, He proved that He had died in our place to pay the price of all sin.

No one can earn a relationship with God. It is a gift of His love and mercy. No one is saved by trying to be good; we are saved by trusting in Jesus: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (EPHESIANS 2:8-9 NKJV). By simple, child-like faith you may enter into a personal relationship with the One who made you.

Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. ☘

**WHILE WE ARE
WEARILY WAITING,
HE IS WORKING
IN WAYS WE CAN'T
SEE OR KNOW.**

Excerpted from *The Sweet Side of Suffering* by M. Esther Lovejoy.
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Hope in Hard Times

These reflections and Bible reading notes from *Our Daily Bread* are designed to bring comfort, hope and encouragement to those facing illness. Each article has been selected to address the worries and pain associated with physical illness and injuries and serves as a reminder that the Great Doctor is with you and knows your every need.

For information on our resources, visit ourdailybread.org

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