

Learning to *Trust Him* as we walk along

STONY

*Paths*

**Becky L. White**



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# ENDORSEMENTS

I've had the pleasure of sitting at Becky's kitchen with a cup of coffee, talking about life and the goodness of God, and can say that this book reflects who Becky is - child of God, a fellow friend who is broken, a trophy of the grace and mercy of our all-loving, ever-faithful God. With gentleness and humility, Becky shares the treasures of the Word and the fruit of her journey with God. Each page is as comfortable as that spot at her table, and yet challenges the reader to find the "more" of God that gives life abundantly in all circumstances.

*Barb Albert*

*Pastor and author of 100 Answers to 100 Questions About Prayer, Charisma House*

Becky White has been through many difficult days, perhaps as you have, and has had good reason to feel fearful, worried, and anxious in this life. But she clung hard along the way to God's word, seeing real workaday meaning and comfort there and more, even the strength to continue. God has blessed her with the ability to transmit that meaning, comfort, and strength in short, real-to-life devotionals that are as deep as their source. May you be as blessed by her ministry as I have been!

*Dave Lusignolo*

*Laity, First United Methodist Church of Mont Belvieu, Texas*

Becky draws upon her life experiences and the Lord's faithfulness through them to encourage others treading through turbulent waters. She is a gifted writer – drawing upon her love for the Lord, steadfastness in prayer and reliance upon scripture to bring hope to the hurting, broken and downtrodden. Becky is a living example of God's healing and restoration.

*Bill Bolin*

*Grove City Church of the Nazarene, Prayer Coordinator*

***Stony Paths*** is an excellent resource for Christians of all denominations and is refreshingly relatable in its presentation of the Gospel message. Becky has captured the emotions and struggles we feel as we each travel our own paths and has offered a reminder of God's grace and mercy. This collection of devotionals offers relevant, scripture-based messages of encouragement, reassurance, and love.

*Rev. Sean Leick, M.Div.*

*Pastor- First United Methodist Church, Port Neches, TX*

Becky clearly has an intimate relationship with Jesus. She skillfully shares her own life experience in light of the Word to bring practical truths for daily living. You will be inspired, encouraged, and most of all reminded that you are loved by the Living God.

*Todd R. Marrah*

*Ph.D. Superintendent Tree of Life Christian Schools*

*Executive Pastor Rock City Church*

*Board Member Columbus Dream Center*

Throughout her book, Becky White encourages the reader to 'step out of the boat' and faithfully **trust** in the Lord's perfect and pleasing plan for your life. As I walk along my own stony paths of life, this book is a constant reminder of the truth found in Scripture that says, "*Don't worry about anything; instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank Him for all he has done.*" *Philippians 4:6*

*Bebe Higgins*

*Director of Operations and In-House Programming - Columbus Dream Center*

For anyone who has experienced challenges along life's journey, this book provides refreshment, insight, and encouragement from God's word. Becky shares deep spiritual wisdom from her own personal valleys. She encourages her readers to lean on God's truths in the midst of uncertainty. Avoiding shallow conclusions, Becky gets to the heart of the matter with thoughtful honesty and grace. This is a read for those in the real world with real problems and difficulties to overcome. For anyone who's been in a valley, this is a book to highly recommend!

*Ursula Kemp*

*Director, Prayer Ministries - Catalyst for Columbus*







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*To trust God in the light is nothing – to trust Him in the dark –  
that is faith.*

Charles Spurgeon

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Dedicated

*To all who have walked the stony path.*

# FORWARD

**W**hen I need help I look for someone who is qualified to help. Whether my area of need is for an auto mechanic, doctor, plumber, facing difficult life experiences, or my ailing tennis game I look for someone qualified to assist in my area of need.

How do I quantify the qualified?

Expertise: Do they possess in depth knowledge regarding my area of need?

Experience: I'm not looking for someone with unproven theories. I am looking for someone with proven solutions. And lots of practice. Trustworthy Reputation: Are they honest? Do they deliver what they promise? Will they give me their best advice? Relationship: Are they caring? Do they listen? Will they hear what I say? Will they be there for me in the long haul?

The book you are holding in your hand, and the author Becky White, get high marks on all counts. You may feel like no one really understands your struggles. Be assured Becky White understands. Very few will have a life struggle she has not personally experienced, prayed her way through, and come out stronger on the other side.

Becky's caring compassion fills the pages of this book. At the same time, she will always tell you the truth. Let's call it God Truth. Time-tested, scripturally based, spiritually sound truth. Truth for life's difficult experiences. Truth that will lead you to a better place.

***Stony Paths*** may not help you find an auto mechanic, plumber, or fix your tennis game. But it will provide you with Godly wisdom, and encouragement, for facing difficult life experiences.

STEVE CAMPBELL  
Founder Columbus Dream Center.  
*Formerly, Better Way Ministries*



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## Stony Paths



*“If God Sends Us On Stony Paths  
He Provides Strong Shoes.”*

Corrie ten Boom



**BECKY L. WHITE**

## Stony Paths

# INTRODUCTION

Corrie ten Boom, a Nazi concentration camp survivor, once said, “If God sends us on stony paths, He provides strong shoes.” And I would add, some of us have been blessed with combat boots! We have discovered by experience that life isn’t “fair.” Bad things happen and difficulties occur even for followers of Christ and no one is exempt from the difficulties of life. This devotional book will wrestle with what trust in God looks like, and how to trust Him, on the stony paths of real life.

In the pages that follow, you will not find a guaranteed-result-producing prayer. Nor will it reveal where all the magic wands are kept, wands that magically wave away pain and trials. *Sorry*. What it *will* offer is an authentic look at the real-world, hot-mess, pain-filled trials of life against the backdrop of the utter faithfulness of the God we serve (Lamentations 3:23). After all, If He willingly gave the life of His only Son for us, surely, we can trust Him with \_\_\_\_\_. (John 3:16, Romans 8:32)

But let’s be real, it’s not that easy, is it?

EMBEDDED WITHIN EVERY TRIAL WE HEAR GOD ASKING,

It’s hard to trust someone you don’t know. In fact, I

“CHILD, WILL YOU TRUST ME?”

would say it’s impossible to genuinely trust someone you don’t have a close relationship with. Even then, trust doesn’t come easy, does it? That’s why our first stop is to make certain that we have begun an authentic relationship with God through His only Son, Jesus Christ (John 1:18, John 3:16, 1 Timothy 2:5). We can’t, and won’t, trust Him if we don’t really know Him. So, if you aren’t sure or you want to reaffirm or if you want to surrender your life to Him for the first time, pray a prayer something like the following. Remembering, it’s a heart-issue more than the specific verbiage. If the prayer isn’t

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something you're interested in now, perhaps by the last page of this book, you'll consider it. That is my prayer.

*Lord Jesus, I come to You today admitting I am a sinner in need of You, The Savior. I believe You died on the Cross as payment for my entire sin-debt. I believe You rose from the dead on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. Please wash me with Your blood and make me new. Make me clean. I turn from my old life and surrender myself to You. Thank You for coming to live within me through the Person of Your Holy Spirit. According to Your Word, I am now part of Your family! Thank You! In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen. (Romans 10:9)*

Just like any relationship, it takes time and shared experiences to learn *experientially* that someone is worthy of our trust. As we walk with our Father God, and leaning on Him through the good times as well as the inevitable trials of everyday life, we gain confidence in our God and His character.

These bite-size readings will help us navigate what it looks like in real-world terms to trust God. To trust His Power, His Goodness and His Wisdom – all carefully overlaid with His absolute faithfulness. Not in an artificial, snow globe form of Christianity, but when life becomes a hot-mess and the worse-case scenarios are happening all around us ... when the road is blocked by boulders or the stony path has become painful to our tender feet ... it's then we find that trust in God steadies our footing and stabilizes us in the midst of the trials of life.

My heart longs for each of us to cry out, “Yes, Lord, I choose to trust You in this ... whatever the outcome.”

*Becky*

IN GOD I HAVE PUT MY TRUST, I SHALL NOT BE  
AFRAID. WHAT CAN MAN DO TO ME?

PSALM 56:11 NASB

Recently, a friend asked what drew me to write a book on the topic of trusting God. The answer came immediately....

Let me share with you what I told him that day ... I was confronted with emergency open heart surgery with no time to think through the seriousness of the situation. The doctors explained that with a near total blockage in what is often referred to as the “widow maker”, I had no time to spare ... this was life and death ... surgery was needed *immediately*. While I am no spring chicken and would never be confused for an athlete, I am in decent physical condition, try to eat healthy and exercise, so this news came as a complete shock to my husband and I. Understanding what must be done, we held hands and prayed together, thanking our heavenly Father for His flawless timing and protection on my behalf (and asking Him to help the surgeons of course!).

Days later, as I became fully aware of what had actually happened and how close I came to dying, I was overcome with thankfulness and gratitude to the Lord. So excited to share with nurses, friends, housekeeping staff ... anyone who would listen, about how the Lord spared my life. Of how good God is. How loving and faithful. But then it hit me ... like being smacked across the face. What if He had said “no” to our prayers of healing? What if God had not caused the blockage to become known and I had died suddenly? What if my husband was planning my funeral rather than planning my home therapy sessions? And what about the people who heard me gush about my near-fatal experience? What if they had a family member who faced the same scenario but their mother or wife or friend had died instead of the miraculous intervention I had experienced?

This question reverberated in my heart - Is God still good and is He still worthy of trust, even when the answer is *No*? Is my trust in Him total and complete or is it only for particular outcomes?

We trust Him for finances or safety. We trust Him for basic necessities. We trust Him for healing. And we should. But there is a still deeper level of trust that our Father God is calling us to. A trust that stands alone – separate from our hoped-for outcome. *To simply trust Him, no matter the outcome*. A trust in the goodness of God based on His word that tells us that if He was willing to give the life of His Son for us, is there anything He will withhold? You

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see, if we look at the Cross of Christ as our backdrop, then we can look the rawest reality in the face with the knowledge that if He has allowed it, I can trust that He has a plan, a purpose and that He knows what is ultimately best for me.

I still share with anyone willing to listen to what the Lord did for me ... but I always bring it around to this point: Even if He had called me home that day, He is still good, He is still faithful and I trust Him.

Even when we don't understand. He is worthy of our trust.

Though I must admit that I have cheated a bit on this whole trusting the Lord thing, you see, He's given me lots of practice. Maybe He's done the same for you too. I've buried two children; I've walked through betrayal as well as financial collapse and as with many folks, childhood brought its own set of challenges. And if that weren't enough, I made plenty of messes that caused

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“LEAVE IT ALL IN THE HANDS THAT WERE  
WOUNDED FOR YOU”

*Corrie ten Boom*

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great distress for me and others. Through it all, I have learned by experience that our Father God can be trusted – no matter the outcome and no matter the reason for our mess.

As you read through the devotions in this book, it is my prayer that the Lord will enable you to look your darkest challenge in the face and know with certainty that He loves you. That your Father God is trustworthy. No matter the outcome. He will walk you through this. You are not alone. He loved you enough to send His Son to die for you. With that as your life's backdrop, be intentional about viewing all you walk through as filtered through His fingers. He's got this. Let's trust Him as we walk the stony paths of life.

Learning to *Trust Him* as we walk along

# STONY

*Paths*

Becky L. White

## Stony Paths



# GENTLE REMINDER

*“You were wearied by the length of your road, Yet you did not say, ‘It is no use.’ You found renewed strength, Therefore you did not grow weak.”* Isaiah 57:10 AMPC

*Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. Say to those with anxious heart, “Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; The recompense of God will come, He will save you.”*

Isaiah 35: 3-4 AMPC

All of us need a reminder now and then. When life hits us square between the eyes or when a challenge grows from weeks to months to years ... we need reminded that God is in control, that He is at work, that He has a plan. The challenges, set-backs and real-world reality of life have a way of draining our strength, weakening our resolve, even obscuring our view of our Father God’s love. Like the dripping of water eroding a mountainous rock, trials that are long in duration can erode even the mightiest among us.

If HOPE has become a 4-letter word to you. If a painful circumstance has gone from a simple set-back to a way of life. If anxious thoughts fill your heart, robbing you of His peace. If the unthinkable has touched your life ....

May I gently remind you? Not with syrupy, I-feel-your-pain, empty words – but with *His inerrant and infallible Word*. The same Word that has sustained me, and countless others, through some of life’s toughest challenges. He has promised never to leave or forsake us and to be our Mighty Fortress. He promises that though we walk through fiery trials, we will not be burned, neither will the flame kindle upon us. He is behind and before us. And that when the enemy comes in like a flood, He will lift up a standard against him and put him to flight. Though He allows for

our free will, He assures us that no plan of His can be thwarted and His sovereignty rules over all.

Our trials aren't proof that He doesn't care or is impotent to act. In whatever form they take, our trials are opportunities to walk out the reality of our trust in Him and learn by experience that **He is good, He is faithful and He is enough.**

"The secret is Christ in me, not me in a different set of circumstances." - *Corrie ten Boom*

*My Lord Jesus, As You have strengthened me, not by the absence of trials but in the midst of them, I pray You will infuse strength into Your weary ones today. Grant the ability to arise to new life and fresh hope, and a knowing that You have it all under control...whatever the outcome ... we can trust You. In the mighty name of Jesus, Amen.*



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Our trials aren't proof that He doesn't care or that  
He is impotent to act.

Becky White

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# LORD, IF YOU HAD BEEN HERE...

*The sisters sent word to Jesus saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." John 11:3*

*Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was. John 11: 5-6*

*Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." John 11:20-21*

If you've never read the Biblical account of Lazarus (or it's been a while), grab a cup of coffee, open your Bible to John 11, and prepare for emotional whiplash. And questions. Lots of questions, and possibly a whole new perspective on the "dead" things of your life.

Let's take a look at the cliff-note version. Jesus, given news that a friend, whom He loved, was near death, chose to wait two days before even beginning the long journey to see him. In fact, the Word tells us that **because** of Jesus' love, He purposefully waited. Waited while the sisters, who had sent word of the illness, longed for a miracle. Waited until death had occurred. Waited. Until there was no hope. At all.

Only when the situation was a complete impossibility, did Jesus show up on the scene.

## Stony Paths

On the outskirts of the city, Jesus was met with the heart wrenching, I-can-feel-your-pain guttural cry of Martha, "Lord if You had been here, my brother would not have died." The other sister, Mary, uttered the exact words, guttural ache and all .... *can't you just feel the pain reverberating from their question?*

In their pain, it never occurred to them, even for a moment, that this Jesus, whom they sought in order to bring healing for their brother, would instead, raise him from the dead. That He would allow such tragedy as a vehicle to bring such glory. That He would risk being misunderstood and misjudged as uncaring, in order to grant them the gift of seeing God's miraculous power first hand. *On their behalf.* To be shared for all time - to encourage others in their "dead" and impossible circumstances.

Truly, I don't know what has "died" in your life or how impossible it looks right now. But He knows. Has a marriage or a dream or a relationship died? Has a literal death occurred and your hopes for the future died as well? Maybe, like these two sisters, you've cried through tears, "Lord if You had been here." Maybe you've reacted by turning your back on the One who loves you, hardening your heart as you've secretly cried, "Lord, how could You?"

No judgement call here, I've done it myself a time or two or ten ... I cried out as I buried two children and as I struggled through other chasm deep trials - some of my own making and some not...But in the end, I clearly see how He has faithfully used my pain, or done the impossible by bringing life out of a "dead" situation in my life as He walked me through it. Learning firsthand that if He has allowed "it", He has a purpose and a plan for it and I can trust Him. And so can you dear one. So can you ...

*“If it is to be a great miracle, the condition is not difficulty, but impossibility.” Streams in the Desert 10/14*

*Oh Father, I admit that I have thought, even if left unspoken, the words – “If You had been here...” I am ashamed at my lack of trust in You Father. When difficulties happen, what makes me think that You don’t have a plan? That You have lost control? That You can’t bring life from what has “died”? You are good and You are faithful...and You are for me... I love you. In Jesus name, Amen*



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There is nothing accidental in the life  
of an obedient child of God.

Paul E. Billheimer

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## SOMEBODY KNOWS

*You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all. PSALM 139:2-4 NASB*

Are you old enough to remember the 'ol song... "Nooooobody knooooows the trouble I've seen ..." Not exactly a pick-me-upper is it? Worse than being a depressingly, feel-sorry-for-me tune, it's a lie from the enemy of our soul.

The Bible tells us that the Lord God knows exactly how we feel. In fact, the original Hebrew word used for understand includes the word feel. So we could read the above verse this way, "You feel my thoughts." Digest that for a moment, beloved. He feels your thoughts. I need a Kleenex just thinking about that truth.

The enemy wants us to sink in the emotional pit of despair and isolation as he whispers the vicious lie, "No one cares about you, no one understands or knows how you feel. You are all alone in this." Cue the violin. He has us right where he wants us. But wait just a minute. Before we nod our heads in agreement and give in to despair – What does God's Word say? Though we walk through valleys, He promises to walk with us. Though we walk through fires, He promises they will not destroy us. And whatever our pain, He feels it with us.

I wish I could promise that He removes all our difficulties or keeps adversity from ever grazing our life, but we both know that's not true. What I can promise is this – whatever your circumstance, whatever your pain, you are not alone. Someone

does know how you feel. Someone is feeling the pain right along with you. And that Someone is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Beloved, He knows your path. (Job 23:10) He knows your unspoken pain. He is with you every step of the way.

If you'll let Me, I'll use your trials to make you into someone I can use in the lives of others to show them that no matter where they've been, no matter how deep the hole, no matter how painful the trial, there's hope. - Kay Arthur

*Father, You know exactly how I feel, even when I can't articulate my thoughts, You feel them with me. Teach me to rest in the Truth of Your Word, more than my feelings. Thank you, precious Lord! In Jesus' name, Amen*



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God, who foresaw your tribulation,  
has specially armed you to go through  
it, not without pain but without stain.

C.S. Lewis

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## SAUSAGE SCENARIOS

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*

1 Corinthians 15:58

Some of the challenges we face in life can be compared to making sausage. A plump, grilled bratwurst tastes delicious, but you definitely don't want to watch the creation process! Just trust that the maker knows what He's doing as you wait for the end result.

But if you're anything like me, when I'm faced with difficulties, I often make the mistake of "watching the process" a bit too close. I notice all the ingredients, all the prep work, all the grinding, and the pressing into the casing sleeve ... and then the heat of the fire ... and I begin to lose heart. Lose focus. Lose hope.

Recently, as my mind lingered long on a particular sausage-making trial, I said a quick prayer of, "O Father...You know what they need, please help." Looking down, my eye caught a worn and stained post-it note taped to my desk with these words, "Your labor is not in vain in the Lord." And "Do not grow weary in doing good ..."

O, Father! How I needed to be reminded of that Truth! Help me trust You and not give up.

That little post-it note Scripture enabled me to snap back to a Christ-centered, God-is-bigger-than anything-we-face reality. A reality that doesn't ignore life's trials but rather, puts them in perspective. The truth is, we all have trials to walk through, but



if we stare too long at the “process”, we will lose heart. Lose focus. Lose hope.

What is your sausage scenario? Have you stared long at ...

Your pain

Your health

Your loneliness

Your children, or your lack of children

Your spouse, or your lack of a spouse

Your career challenges

Your disappointment

Your list of what if's

Your loss

Your grief...?

It's okay. Admit it. But don't stay there. Look up from your sausage-trial and back to your God. Ask Him to help you refocus, to snap back to a Christ-centered reality rather than staring at your sausage scenario. He is at work. He is faithful. His Word is true.

“If you look at the world, you'll be distressed. If you look within, you'll be depressed. If you look at God you'll be at rest.” - CORRIE TEN BOOM

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*Father, please help me to refocus onto You rather than the impossibility in front of me. Even as I do all I can - praying and serving, enable me to rest and trust You and Your word more than what I see and feel. Thank you, Lord! In Jesus' name, Amen!*



---

During the times when God seems far away,  
not only is He nearer than you can imagine.  
But He is specifically working in your life to  
create a treasure beyond measure.

Tim Burns

---



# RECIPE FOR PEACE

*Be still and rest in the Lord; wait for Him and patiently lean yourself upon Him; fret not yourself because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.*

*Do not fret or have any anxiety about anything, but in every circumstance and in everything, by prayer and petition (definite requests), with thanksgiving, continue to make your wants known to God.*

*And God's peace [shall be yours]...[His peace] which transcends all understanding shall garrison and mount guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

Psalm 37:7 Philippians 4:6-7 AMPC

I'm not very good at following a recipe. I'm sure it comes from years of creating the dreaded casserole (as the kids would say) working to stretch a dollar and stretch the contents of the frig – throwing in whatever we had to create the hoped-for taste. Eye-balling and improvising my way through the cooking until a “casserole surprise” culinary delight appeared on the table.

While this approach works great for hamburger surprise, it doesn't work well when dealing with depression, sadness, heaviness and anxiety. These heavy weights that seem to be spirally in our world today require a step-by-step, grab-my-glasses recipe approach. We dare not ignore the ingredient list the Lord has offered us or the steps He has provided. The end result will be His peace that is beyond our understanding. Not a shallow circumstance-based peace ... but peace no matter the circumstance ....

Though I'm not a \*doctor nor do I play one on TV, I have walked through seasons of great difficulty and depression inducing trials ... *and have found by experience* the great faithfulness of our Father God to provide authentic peace that was beyond my understanding

So here's my recipe for handling depression –

At the first sign of painful emotions bubbling up, ***I talk to the Lord*** about it. Then I open His Word (the Bible) to Psalms anywhere. I jokingly say “anywhere” but truly, the book of Psalms is medicine to the hurting heart and mind. Read it out loud and offer the Psalmist's words back to the Lord as your prayer. Allow the words to speak your heart when you have no words to articulate your pain or sense of heaviness.

***Be careful what you allow your mind to dwell on.***

Next, **I turn in the New Testament to Philippians 4**, reading aloud His words as they wash over my spirit ... reminding me not to fret or have anxiety about anything but to pray about everything. Knowing He promises to literally protect my mind from the enemy as I turn my anxieties over to Him with a heart of thankfulness. Reading further in chapter 4 , I am reminded to be careful what I allow my mind to dwell on.

I wish I could promise that following this “recipe” would remove the thing causing us emotional pain or depression, it won't. But it will enable us to ***walk through*** the inevitable painful valleys of life ... with an unexplainable soul-deep peace unmoved by the waves of difficulty.

*My Lord, so many times You have used Your Word to wash over my troubled spirit - providing Your peace in the midst of difficulties.*

*Please enable those walking through emotional pain today to lean onto You and entrust their soul to Your care. In Jesus' mighty name, Amen.*

***\*Of course, there are some situations where a doctor's counsel is needed – but never to the neglect of God's Word.***



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TrialS reveal what we think about God.

Jude D'Souza

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## REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS

Gideon said to Him, “O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the LORD has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.”

Judges 6:13 NKJV

If you’re not familiar with the Old Testament story of the life of Gideon, or it’s been a while, grab your sweet tea, relax and prepare for real-life, real-world questions. When you have 10 minutes read all of Gideon’s story in Judges 6 and 7. It’s astounding.

We first meet Gideon in the middle of his work day, as he’s “beating wheat in a winepress to hide it from the Midianites.” Needless to say, a winepress is not where one usually threshes wheat! He’s had to alter his normal way of life and normal way of earning a living to accommodate the presence of his enemies. He’s also had to face the overwhelming fear that’s gripped him in the process. And then, smack in the middle of his routine and difficulty, the Angel of the Lord shows up and speaks to him. Reminding him that the Lord is with him.

His first response to the heavenly interruption is stunningly authentic and real-world. Gideon asks the questions each of us have wrestled with at some point in life. Questions that so permeated his thoughts that as an angel stood in his very presence, rather than fall to the ground in shock, he blurted out loud what was loudest in his thinking. “Why?”

“If the Lord really is with us ... with me ... why then has all this difficulty happened to us? Where are all His miracles I have heard about?” Can you hear the accusation or possibly anger dripping from his line of questioning? Can you hear the disappointment mingled with despair in his tone as he wrongly assumes that his current trials mean God has abandoned him? Or his assumption that lack of trials is a sign of God’s presence.

“If God is with us then why? ... why our child’s death? Why divorce? Why a challenging childhood, why a still-born child? Why abuse or neglect or unemployment or a wayward child... or no child? Why a broken relationship or a painful, lonely relationship ... I could go on....

I don’t know why; I wish I did. I wish I could hand you the answer to the “why” of your circumstance – I can’t. But what I can assure you of is this – according to God’s word, trials do not indicate the abandonment of God. In fact, they might just indicate His nearness in a way we cannot imagine. The Psalmist reminds us, “He is near the brokenhearted.” We are assured of His presence with us, whether or not He miraculously delivers from our trials or walks us through them – either way, He is with us. He is with you. He will not forsake you. Share your heart and questions with the Sovereign One ... and then rest in Him.

Now grab your glass of sweet tea and open your Bible to Judges 6, see what He will speak to your heart dear one.

Trials do not indicate the abandonment of God. In fact, they might just indicate His nearness in a way we cannot imagine. – BECKY WHITE

Stony Paths

*Father, I am so thankful for Your abiding presence, Your great faithfulness and Your peace. As I walk through the inevitable challenges of life, enable me to be more aware of Your Presence and find my rest in You...not in anything else. In Jesus' name, Amen*



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Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.

Psalm 42:11 NASB

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# I AM NO DIFFERENT

*For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory (Standard) of God.*  
Romans 3:23

*For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ. 2*  
Corinthians 5:21

As worship music filled the air of a recent urban ministry church service, I couldn't help but notice dozens of glowing cellphones. Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and gaming of all sorts mixed oddly with the sound of Power in the Blood being sung. Anger arose within me as I felt a righteous indignation at such open disrespect for our Lord. *Don't they know? Don't they care?* I thought to myself. While I understood this was a unique congregation, full of many folks who lived on the land (homeless) as well as just regular down and out folks ... yet surely that was no excuse for such disrespect and rudeness. Irritation continued growing within me.

As the \*speaker began to share, it wasn't long before he mentioned the still-going-on cellphone use. I was glad he felt compelled to say something about it. The speaker went on to say how disrespectful it was to use the cell phones while worship music is being sung, or to use cell phones while God's word is being taught. (That's right! I thought to myself). Then he paused and with a heavy sigh said, "But I am no different..."

I'm not sure what the speaker said after that because I felt smacked right in the face with those words ... *I am no different.*

I was immediately reminded of how often my own mind wanders from God's presence when I open my Bible for quiet time in the morning, all the while my thoughts drift to what I'm going to wear for the day or if I'm having a bad hair day or my work responsibilities or what's for dinner. Though I am talking with the Lord, I'm really "playing on my phone"... just as much as

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those folks I had so self-righteously complained about. *Ouch!* No Becky, *you are no different.* A sinner in desperate need of God's grace.

Tell me, how many of us who sit in church services in suburbia land, sing worship songs or listen as the pastor teaches from God's Word – all the while our thoughts range from the football game later that day, to what's for dinner or how beautiful the woman is in front of us or something even less savory, or dread about the upcoming work-week, etc. You get the idea. How many of us try to look "picture perfect" on the outside while on the inside we are no different than those with the glowing cell phones playing games and watching Youtube? At least those in the urban church ministry were authentic. No façade. No pretense.

*I am no different.* You are no different. We are all a hot-mess and a lost-mess, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. Apart from His saving grace, His mercy and His shed Blood on our behalf.

Porn addiction, Burger King addiction. Adultery, homosexuality. Potty-mouth, self-righteous nonsense. *All of us need the Savior.*

*"I'm just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread."*

-D.T. Niles

*Oh Father,*

*I am so thankful for the reminder of what and who I am apart from You. Please cleanse me from self-righteousness and self-focus. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

\*That speaker was my husband, Stu White.

## IS HE TRUSTWORTHY?

*This is the confidence we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, he hears us. And if He hears us, we have as our present possession, those things we've asked of Him.*

*You have need of endurance that after you have done the will of God, you may receive what has been promised.*

*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

*This hope we have as an anchor of the soul.*

*Wait for and confidently expect the Lord; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for and confidently expect the Lord.*

*1 John 5:15 (NASB and AMP), Hebrews 10:36 , Hebrews 11:1 AMP, Hebrews 6:19a NASB Psalm 27:14 AMP*

Mindlessly running a soapy sponge across the dinner plate, I looked out our kitchen window admiring the view of our backyard. My eyes turned to the lawn and I noticed it would soon need cut. As quickly as the thought entered my mind it evaporated because I know my husband. "He'll take care of that", I reminded myself as I picked up another dish. Even if days go by and the grass gets taller than usual, I am confident that it hasn't escaped his notice. He'll do it. So, assured that it's not something I have to be concerned about – I don't give it a second thought.

The following morning, as I sat alone with the Lord and read His word, I felt a wave of anxiousness come over me as my mind lingered on a particular trial that I had already prayed about ... already placed into His care. Was my Father God less reliable than my husband? Could I take my husband at his word and not

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trust my Lord to honor His? Praying, I confessed, “Father. I know You see my need and have heard my prayers...I trust You. Even when I can’t see how or understand the why or it seems to be taking longer than I had hoped. Help me remember, just like my husband and the lawn ... each time this need comes to my mind – “It’s alright, my Father is taking care of it.”

Dear one, I realize I am making this sound so very simple and your needs may be so very complicated and perhaps even impossible – yet this I know – we serve a God who delights in doing the impossible for His children; He watches over His Word to perform it and He acts on behalf of those whose hearts are completely His. He will either change your circumstance or walk you THROUGH your circumstance.

Look at your difficulty in all its facets and then remind yourself, “It’s alright, my Father is taking care of it, He has it all under control.”

*My Lord, enable me to present my needs, laying down my heavy burdens and then rest in You. Cause me to remember that You haven't forgotten me even if the days turn into months or years ... You are working out Your perfect will. Cause me to rest in You. Thank You Father! In Jesus' name, Amen*

# HAS GOD SAID?

*Did God really say...? Genesis 3:1*

*Jesus answered, "It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God." Matthew 4:4*

*How does one know where to land their feet on the solid foundation of what Truth actually is? In our culture and world, we are daily saturated with "my truth" and "their truth" and "relative" truth. All the while our senses are bombarded with evil portrayed as good, and good described as evil.*

Today's "devotional" is born from my own wrestling with the enemy of our soul, as I daily make the deliberate choice to speak out the Truth to counteract the enemy's lies and half-truths. It's up to me. Up to you. What we do with those lies dropping like pigeon poo into our minds. The enemy has not changed his tactics from that first garden conversation as he questioned the clarity/certainty, and then legitimacy, of God's clear word. "Did God really say...?"

***So let's remind ourselves of what God has indeed said...***

Has God not said that He will never leave or forsake us? Yes, He has. Deuteronomy 31:6, Hebrews 13:5

Has God not said that He is near the brokenhearted? Yes, He has. Psalm 34:18

Has God not said that He who began a good work in us will complete it? Yes, He has. Philippians 1:6

*Stony Paths*

Has God not said that He will cause all things to work together, and are fitting into a plan for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose? Yes, He has. Romans 8:28

Has God not said that He sits as King over all that floods our lives? Yes, He has. Psalm 29:10

Has God not said that He is a Father to the fatherless? Yes, He has. Psalm 68:5

Has God not said, "Come to Me all who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest"? Yes, He has. Matthew 11:28

Has God not said that although we walked through the darkest valleys, we have nothing to fear because He is with us? Yes, He has. Psalm 23:4 NIV

Has God not said that we are to take up the full armor of God? Yes, He has. Ephesians 6:11-18

Has God not said that He hears us when we call? Yes, He has. Psalm 34:17

Has God not said, "He who formed the ear, does He not hear? And He who formed the eye, does He not see?" Yes, He has. Psalm 94:9

Did God not say that He made them male and female? Yes, He has. Genesis 5:2

Has God not said that though the enemy comes in like a flood He will lift up a standard against him and put him to flight? Yes, He has. Isaiah 59:19

Has God not said that there is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus? Yes, He has. Romans 8:1

Has God not said that though we walk through deep waters we will not drown? Yes, He has. Isaiah 43:2

Has God not said that when we walk through fiery trials that we will not be burned? Yes, He has. Isaiah 43:2

Has God not said, “fear not”? Yes, He has. Isaiah 41:10, Isaiah 44:8 and MANY other instances!

Has God not said, “be anxious for nothing but pray about everything”? Yes, He has. Philippians 4:6

Has God not said that His Word is tested and tried? Yes, He has. Psalm 18:30

Has God not said that what the enemy meant for evil that He means for good? Yes, He has. Genesis 50:20

Has God not said that My servant shall live by faith in every Word of God? Yes, He has. Habakkuk 2:4, Hebrews 10:38, Romans 1:17

Has God not said that if He is for us who, or what can be against us? Yes, He has. Romans 8:31,

Has God not said that no weapon formed against us shall prosper, but every tongue that rises against us in judgement we shall show to be wrong? Yes, He has. Isaiah 54:17

Has God not said that it is impossible for Him ever to prove false or deceive us? Yes, He has. Hebrews 6:18 AMPC

Has God not said that the devil is a liar and the father of lies? Yes, He has. John 8:44

### *Stony Paths*

Has God not said that our enemy prowls about like a roaring lion looking for someone to seize upon and devour? Yes, He has. 1 Peter 5:8

Has God not said that if we to submit to Him and resist the devil, that he will flee from us? Yes, He has. James 4:7

Has God not said that our own hearts are desperately wicked? Yes, He has. Jeremiah 17:9

Now comes the question, who/what are we going to trust? Are we going to take God at His Word? Or are we going to believe (or dangerously entertain) the lies and half-truths of the enemy, the father of lies? Are we going to trust our own flawed perceptions rather than His Word?

Let's take our stand. Speak The Truth. Resist the enemy by putting on the hard-hat of His word and keep those pigeon-droppings of lies from our mind!



## DEALT CARDS

*I trusted in, relied on, and was confident in You, O Lord; I said, You are my God. My times are in Your hands.*

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of sympathy and the God of all comfort, Who comforts (consoles and encourages) us in every trouble (calamity and affliction), so that we may also be able to comfort (console and encourage) those who are in any kind of trouble or distress, with the comfort (consolation and encouragement) with which we ourselves are comforted (consoled and encouraged) by God.*



*Psalm 31:14b-15a & 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 AMPC*

“That’s just the hand I was dealt” says the person that endured a crummy childhood or was born into poverty or family disfunction. Or when life throws a few curve balls such as a spouse walking out or a child rebelling or coping with the pain of infertility or dealing with a prolonged illness. That’s when we would love the chance to say, “Re-deal”, I have a crappy hand!”

Recently, over lunch with a friend, we talked about some of our own “dealt cards” such as childhood trauma, relationship betrayal, death of children, life-threatening illnesses, financial difficulties and some cards that are too sensitive to bring out into the light. On the drive home, after our lunch discussion of dealt cards, I mentally opened my hand, fanning out my life’s cards. I was stunned at the Lord’s perfect wisdom and providence in His dealings (no pun intended) with me. Though I would have passed on several of the cards or traded if I had been given a choice, I

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clearly see that each has its purpose. Through “the hand I was dealt”, The Lord has provided me a platform authenticated by suffering - to minister to others in a way that would have been impossible without those cards of difficulty.

You see, I can pull out my card of betrayal and share authentically with someone going through divorce or desertion. I can pull out my card of grief at having buried two children as I listen (and hug) the one burying a spouse or child. I can pull from the deck my card of illness after walking through a near-death sudden illness, as I listen to their fears or “what ifs.” The Lord has graciously given me the opportunity to say with authenticity, “I’ve been there, I know what that feels like ... I am so sorry for what you’re walking through.”

Alright dear one, what cards have you been dealt? Fan out your hand, look clearly at the cards you’re holding and ask yourself ... how can I leverage this “card” for His glory and another’s good?

*If we are to be good comforters, we must first need comforted.*

- *Anonymous*

*Precious Lord, God of all comfort – thank You for showing Yourself strong on my behalf as You simultaneously comfort me and enable me to comfort others with the comfort, I’ve received from You. I stand amazed at Your faithfulness and goodness toward me! In Jesus’ name, Amen*

How's the trust journey going? I know it's not easy – maybe down right painful. Hang in there dear one ... it won't always be this hard. He's with you. He loves you. He will not fail you.

Is there a family struggle or a physical challenge or financial uncertainty or loneliness that draws your thoughts like a magnet toward the land of “what if?” or “why?” or “when will this end”? Is there an issue from your past that haunts you?

Trusting the Lord while walking through seasons of pain is not easy. Often, well-meaning friends tell us that we need more faith or if we prayed just the right prayer, that the Lord would magically remove our trials. Such confident assertions flow easily from a safe, no-trial-in-sight distance. Don't let it get to you.

Sit back, take a deep breath and lean into His presence through His Word and prayer, as you make the deliberate choice to trust Him in the process. It may not look pretty, and it may feel like your heart is being pulverized in a smoothie blender ... that's just real-life emotions ... it's okay. Be human. Then talk to your heavenly Father about it. Read a Psalm turned-into-a-prayer out loud. Worship Him on this side of your trial. Trust Him with, and in, your pain.

Let me encourage you today – you have not been forgotten by Him. The Lord has bottled your every tear and is nearer than your very breath. (Hebrews 6:10, Isaiah 49:16, Psalm 56:8, Psalm 34:18). Rest in Him dear one, rest in Him.

## Stony Paths



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Learning to trust God, must of course,  
be learned in an environment where  
trusting Him is necessary.

Becky White

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## WHITE-KNUCKLE OR REST?

*He leads us beside quiet waters, He restores our soul. Psalm 23:2b, 3a*

*He who has compassion on them, will lead them and guide them to springs of water.*

*Isaiah 49:10b*

*My sheep hear my voice and another they will not follow. John 10:27*

*Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Matthew 11:29*

Each morning, just before I pour coffee into my disposable paper coffee cup, I hold it up to read the note left by my husband. Every day he faithfully leaves a new note of encouragement/tender love/Bible verse. Okay – you may begin the collective awwwwwwws – I know I am blessed.

Recently, the note read, “Good morning beautiful – REST in Jesus.”

Allow me to admit that my first thought was, “What do you mean?! I’m resting in Jesus. Can’t you tell how at peace I am??” My husband could clearly see what I was oblivious to. Rather than resting in Jesus through my present physical crisis, I was white-knuckling my way through. Later, I had a brief phone call from our oldest son, who unknowingly echoed his step-dad’s words. Once again, the Lord brought to mind the idea of white-knuckling rather than resting.

Feeling driven to do just a bit more rather than listening to the Lord’s still small voice calling me to rest. Rest in the midst of the



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emotional and physical pain. Rest in the midst of the disappointment (and dare I say, grief?) at the reality of my current challenge. Rest in the knowledge that He holds my life and my future in His hands. And what He does with the life I've given Him is His business.

My circumstances haven't changed but the weight of it has shifted from my shoulders to the Lord's as I purposefully cast the whole of my care and anxiety onto Him. I am purposefully listening for His voice to lead me and refusing to allow my thoughts to drive me.

Though a personal antidote, I pray the Lord will speak to you through my (embarrassing) honesty. Is there an area of your life that you're white-knuckling your way through rather than resting in the One who died for you? Rather than allowing Him to lead you beside still waters, are you allowing your thoughts to drive you to emotional/mental/physical exhaustion? It could be a marriage (or lack of one) or a job situation or loneliness or a health crisis or children "in the far country." Whatever the challenge, it's His cue to take His yoke and drop our self-made yoke of oppression.

There comes a crisis hour to each of us – when we face either ruin or something higher than we ever dreamed. God knows how to lead us up to this crisis and He knows how to lead us through.  
- Streams in the Desert 08/20

*Father God, Enable us to rest in You. To allow Your Holy Spirit to have His way...As we release the death-grip of our own efforts that drive us to exhaustion. Thank You for your patience Father. You are so good! We love You! In Jesus' name, Amen.*

# HEAVENLY MINDED

*And God heard the voice of the youth, and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven and said to her, What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the youth where he is. Arise, raise up the youth and support him with your hand...*

*God is our refuge and strength,  
A very present help in trouble.*

*Genesis 21:17-18 AMPC Psalm 46:1*

While there is definitely a back-story to this section of Scripture that you'll want to read fully, allow me to pull Truth from this specific swath. During my time alone with the Lord this morning, admittedly rushed as I sipped hot coffee and wiped the night's sleep from my eyes, all the while keeping a close eye on the clock so I wouldn't run late for work, a phrase leapt off the page at me. The angel of God called to Hagar from heaven. *From Heaven.*

God called to this heart-broken mama from heaven. I don't know about you but when I think of heaven, I picture some far-off distant land, almost nebulous in my mind. Yet ... yet our God leaned from heaven and spoke comfort to this hurting woman. Evidently heaven is so close that God sees and hears and can speak to us from there. That thought astounded me.

Heaven is that close. Even better, God Himself is that close. Close to me. Close enough to actually see my trials and blessings. Close enough to hear my muffled cries. While I know that His Word declares that as His follower, His Spirit lives in me, there is something astoundingly comforting to know Heaven itself is that close as well.

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If you, like me, have a loved-one in heaven, you'll understand how precious that thought is. Heaven. A real place and so close. And even better, my Lord Jesus, who gave His life for me ... the One I've been talking to and walking with all these years, is there! Heaven.

*Father, Your dwelling place – Heaven – is not in some far off land, but near. And a real place. As You sit on the throne of heaven, You are filled with compassion and moved by our struggles. Thank You for the reminder of what awaits those who You have redeemed. Heaven. Cause me to be heavenly-minded as I walk through this life. In Jesus mighty name, Amen.*



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It won't always be this hard.

Elouise Quick

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## ENTIRELY FAITHFUL

*Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters, the floods engulf me. I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God.*

Psalms 69:1-3 NIV

*When you're in rough waters, you will not go down.*

Isaiah 43:2 Msg

As sure as ever, if God puts His children in the furnace, He will be in the furnace with them.

C.H. Spurgeon

I admit it ... at a few years shy of sixty, I still don't know how to swim. I like water to my waist and a bottom I can reach without effort. Safe. Secure. No surprises. With that in mind, the Psalmist's imagery of flood waters lapping at my neck or of vainly searching for the bottom causes an immediate knowing in my spirit. His trials felt more like impending drowning than a leisurely swim.

And if I must have them, I want my trials to be "waist deep." Doable. Manageable. Safe. No surprises. But that's not the way they usually come, is it? No ... life's difficulties often feel like flood waters brimming and lapping around our neck until we are convinced that the riptide of difficulties will pull us under.

I have learned by experienced that although my Lord allows the flood of adversity to practically graze my nostrils, He will not allow them to overwhelm me. He is **ENTIRELY FAITHFUL**.

As for my swimming abilities, my husband has promised to teach me to swim, until he does, I'll stick close to the shore :-). Our Father God is teaching me how to trust and be at peace even as the waters creep up and splash at my neck.

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*Father,*

*There are times when I feel as if I'm drowning in difficulties, practically engulfed in pain. Enable me to simply trust and then rest in Your great faithfulness; granting me Your perspective on all I face. Oh how I love You! In Jesus name, Amen*



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Regardless of the intensity of our storm, we are safest in the middle of the storm *with Christ* than any other place without Him.

Jude D'Souza

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## BUCKEYE CANDY

*Consider it wholly joyful, my brothers, whenever you are enveloped in or encounter trials of any sort or fall into various trials and temptations.*



*Be assured and understand that the trial and proving of your faith bring out endurance and steadfastness and patience.*

*Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you... But rejoice that you share in the sufferings of Christ...*

James 1:2-3 AMPC and 1 Peter 4:12-13a NLT, Berean Study Bible

As I read, reread and held to the light, the above scriptures, I couldn't help but think of my Christmas-time routine of making Buckeye candy. I Roll the peanut butter, powdered sugar and butter into 1-inch balls and then with a toothpick, very carefully dip it in melted chocolate. Because it's supposed to look like a real Buckeye, I take extra effort to keep a small part of the peanut butter goodness uncovered. Try as I might, every now and then a rogue ball falls off the toothpick, becoming completely covered in a bath of melted chocolate. *Totally enveloped*. No spot left untouched by the hot glaze.

In the above verses the Holy Spirit speaks of trials that we *encounter* and others that literally **envelop us**. Like my rogue Buckeye candy ... there is no spot left untouched by the heat of adversity.

## Stony Paths

Some challenges we encounter are *a steady drip of difficulty* that can create cavernous channels of resentment, bitterness, frustration or a sense of hopelessness and despair even as it slowly wears away our inner peace. *Enveloping trials* hardly need an explanation – you know if you’re in one by the sheer all-encompassing take-your-breath-away magnitude...from the gut-punch pain. Jolted by searing heat of the trial that envelops us.

**Nowhere** in Scripture are we told to put on a “spiritual mask” and pretend we enjoy pain. But... we are told to shift our focus and choose to consider, or “count it” as joyful because of what our Father God will accomplish in us and then through us – *because of our trials*. Instead, we offer an honest prayer of, “Father this hurts like crazy, but I trust You. I don’t understand and I don’t like it. But because You are entirely faithful and trustworthy ... I will count this as “joyful” while You work out Your purposes in me through it.”

*Father, there is so much pain. So much despair in our world right now. Please envelop Your people with the Peace that only You can provide and enable us to “count it all joy” as we walk through our times of testing and fiery trials. Produce in us the reflection of Your Son. In Jesus’ mighty name, Amen*



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*He has trusted you with this difficulty.*

- Jeanne Liston

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# INSUFFICIENT FUNDS

*“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day ...”*

*“...to give His life a ransom for many.”*

*1 Corinthians 15:3-4 NASB Mark 10:45*

When the grocery cashier announced my total, to my horror, I realized I didn't have enough money to pay for all the groceries bagged and ready to go. What a sinking feeling! Embarrassed and hoping no one else noticed the exchange taking place, I quietly pointed out which items to remove from my grocery order, items we could live without until my next paycheck. Though this happened several decades ago (a few times), it's still recalled with a twinge of embarrassment and shame.

On this Good Friday, as I think deeply what Jesus Christ did for me, for you, this decades old grocery exchange came to mind. Having insufficient funds to pay for bread, peanut butter and a few boxes of mac and cheese, is nothing compared to being unable to pay the staggering price to redeem our soul. The price so high and the debt so great that we are left entirely helpless and even worse – hopeless. That is our state.

**And yet ...** and yet God so loved the world (that's you and I) that He gave His One and only Son, that whosoever believes (trusts) in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

## Stony Paths

This giving of His Son for us is not a pretty pastel-colored Spring scene. It is a blood spattered, spit dripping, whiskers pulled, muscles contracting and torn – scene of the great exchange taking place. On that first Good Friday, the only begotten Son of God ransomed me. Ransomed you, with His very life. From the Greek, He literally, paid the slave price for us. He exchanged His righteousness for our sin so that we can stand before God sinless. The debt beyond our ability to pay has been paid for us. We add nothing but a grateful, thankful heart for what He has done.

Back to my grocery dilemma. Suppose a stranger overheard my situation and offered to pay what I could not, but out of compounded embarrassment, I said, “No thank you,” or simply ignored the offer. Though the offer was made, it would do me no good if I were unwilling to get over myself and accept the gift. But if I were willing to admit my need and accept the payment offered to me, I could leave the store with all my groceries, debt free. The choice is mine.

*We add nothing but a grateful, thankful heart for what He has done. - BECKY WHITE*

Unlike my grocery bill which only caused embarrassment, having insufficient funds to pay for our sin debt has eternal consequences. Either we pay the debt ourselves by an eternity separated from Him or we humbly reach out and take the gift of payment graciously offered on our behalf. The choice is ours.

This Good Friday, I pray that He enables each of us to grasp even a thin thread of what He has done, of what He has provided for us through the ransom paid those many years ago. To Him be the glory, great things He has done!

*Father, I am speechless at Your mercy and grace toward me. As Your word says, I am privileged to “proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called me out of darkness into His marvelous light.” In Jesus’ mighty name, Amen*



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“To be a Christian means to forgive the  
inexcusable because God has forgiven the  
inexcusable in you.”

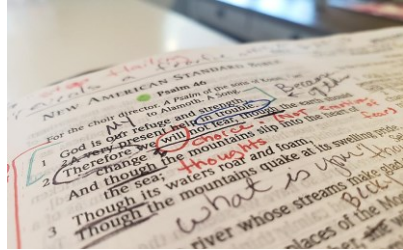
C.S. Lewis

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# HIGHLIGHTS & COVID

*God is my Refuge and Strength,  
a very present help in trouble.  
Therefore, I will not fear,  
though the earth should change  
and though the mountains slip  
into the heart of the sea...*



*I will be still and know He is  
God.*

Psalm 46:1-2,10 Becky's paraphrase.

No, not the Miss Clairol kind of highlights gracing my ever-graying hair...

Social-distancing. Quarantine. Covid-19. Mask-rage. A new vocabulary has arisen. News casts, social media, empty grocery store shelves...no matter where we turn it's there. The reality that our reality has changed, pours forth from every direction. Uncertainty and a sense of unease has suddenly become an ever-present, silent guest.

Feeling the sheer weight of the trial that seems to be engulfing every area of life ... I whispered a prayer of "help", opened my Bible and began scanning the pages for highlighted, underlined and note-beside-them verses. Highlights from past days and past trials with scribbled notes reminding me of all He has walked me through. Not having the mental stamina or emotional energy to search out something new, these old friends are comfort-food for my soul – reminding me of His faithfulness and sovereign control of all that has grazed my life. From death and divorce and betrayal to financial collapse and depression. Even the utter silliness of bad hair days and hormone challenges (yes, I pray and write about it all!).



That's when it hit me. All these neon yellow highlights and "Amen's" scrawled in red ink ... did I still believe what I highlighted? *Now*. In the midst of such world-wide and prescription-for-fear uncertainty? Did these highlights represent the truth and a rock-solid faith to stand on or did they reveal a shallowness that would only carry me through sunny days and desired outcomes? Was my faith a façade or real?

The Holy Spirit gently showed me that fear was trying to assert control where it had no right. Though my emotions might fluctuate with the latest news story, my faith didn't have to. My peace didn't have to and my courage to face the future didn't have to either. I had a choice to make and a God to serve. Whatever the outcome – He is in control and has a purpose. In the meantime, I was to find my strength in the shelter of the Most High and be about His business. *The business He has called me to* – to encourage His people to trust Him no matter the circumstance.

So dear one – as we walk through this unsurpassed trial layered with all the other struggles of everyday life, allow me to encourage you to trust Him in the middle of this storm and find your strength in the shelter of the Most High, He will not fail you. I am not attempting to slap a Band-Aid on cancer or a cutsie meme on real pain – it is front facing the reality and then choosing to trust the God we serve and taking Him at His Word. Period.

If you don't know Him, cry out to Him, He will not reject you. If you already know Him, get to know Him better. Right now, while He has your undivided attention. Look back at your own neon highlights or make some new ones. Start with Psalm 46 ... and highlight dear one, highlight!

## Stony Paths

*Father, You are just as faithful today as I proclaimed last year or last week. As I shelter myself in You and Your Word, infuse me with Your Peace in the midst of the storm and enable me to lead others to You during this season of trial. I love You ... In Jesus name, Amen.*

*\*Too many of us who claim the name of the Lord Jesus Christ are living and walking in fear. Did God's Word suddenly lose its power? Are the promises we've stood on through past difficulties not strong enough for us to stand on today? Whatever the outcome, our lives are in His hands – the days ordained for us have been established before even one began (Psalm 139). Let's take Him at His Word. He Who gave the life of only His Son **for us**, deserves our trust - come what may.*



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You'll never know Jesus is all you  
need, until Jesus is all you have.

Corrie Ten Boom

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# AMAZING GRACE

*For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Romans 5:6 NASB*

*God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. Ephesians 2:8-9 NLT*

During a recent and sudden life-threatening illness, I was confronted with my own utter helplessness. Brought to the end of myself physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually... profoundly aware of my own cavernous lack. It was then that I whispered to the Lord, "I have nothing to offer You, Father... I can barely even pray right now... *I feel so helpless.*"

As the words fell from my lips I could "hear" the Holy Spirit say to my heart, "Daughter, I have never loved you for what you can offer Me. *I just love you...*"

I was stunned. Stunned at the reminder of what I had so easily forgotten. Truth that I first came to know 41 years earlier when I surrendered my life to Christ, after the tragic death of my daughter. The Holy One, the only begotten Son of God paid the penalty I could never pay. The Righteous for the unrighteous. Through this trial, He has kneaded that Truth deeper into my heart .... He simply loves me.

I add nothing to His amazing grace. *And neither do you, dear one.*

All He asks of me ... *and you*, is that we acknowledge our brokenness apart from Him and by the power of His Holy Spirit, turn from the sin that made our salvation necessary. Even our

Stony Paths

ability to cry out in desperation is a gift from Him. Such love. Such mercy. Such grace. Face to the floor astounding.

*“You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary.” - Johnathon Edwards*

As we prepare to celebrate Good Friday (The day Christ was crucified and died) and then Easter (The day He physically rose from the grave) what better time to reflect on what Jesus Christ did for **you** ... for me. While we were still helpless, Christ died for the ungodly. Join with me as we sit in stunned silence at His mercy.

*Father God, my Lord and my Savior, There are no words to adequately speak of Your mercy and grace for one such as I. You love me when I have nothing to offer You...nothing but my own helplessness and brokenness. I bow before You in adoration for Your goodness toward me. How I love You! In Jesus' name, Amen*

## MAGIC WAND?

*The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?"*

*So Daniel was taken up out of the (lion's) den, and no injury whatsoever was found on him because he had trusted in his God.*

*For He is the living God and He has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. Daniel 6:20b Daniel 6:23b Daniel 6:26, 27b NASB*

Did you notice something uncomfortable in these verses? Daniel served God. Trusted God. Constantly. Even had a reputation for doing so. Yet we read that he's being **taken up out** of the lion's den after a night rooming with the felines. Don't we expect to read that Daniel was **kept from** the lion's den? Many of us **know** the "Sunday school" version so well that we don't allow it to penetrate our heart or question the situation with any depth. Daniel trusted, and yet was *thrown into the den* of hungry lions.

I see in my own heart the silent assumption of God's magic formula for handling all trials of life. I pray. I trust. I obey. And voila' - God makes all my paths smooth. Surely, He will **keep me from entering** "lion's den" situations. I can almost hear the buzzer ... eeeehhhh *wrong answer*.

The reality is, the Word of God, and our experiences, are filled with lion's den scenarios. Trials that may not include 400 lb felines but instead contain heartaches or despair, financial reversal or the death of a loved-one. Betrayal or a sense of meaninglessness. Thrown in. Head first.

Daniel opened his eyes in the light of the new day with a renewed trust in his God. Not a trust that hinged on never seeing another den but on a knowing that the living God has the power to sustain him even if ...

Stony Paths

Though we would much prefer He keep us **from the den**, what an amazing testimony He grants us – to see first-hand His power to sustain in the midst of impossibilities. Taking us by the hand as He lifts us *out of* our den situations. Bursting with our own renewed awe at this face-to-the-floor Amazing God we serve.

*O Father, Help me to trust You, even when I find myself, surrounded by the lions of life. Teach me a depth of trust that isn't dependent on comfortable circumstances or desired outcomes. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen*



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Sometimes we must simply take God's  
hand and walk **through** things.

Not around or over – **but through**.

Becky White

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# MY JESUS – A PERSONAL PSALM

Though, as of this writing, it's been nearly 18 years, the memory is fresh in my mind. Smugly (though not realizing my own heart of spiritual yucko at the time) I sat back in the theater seat to watch on the big screen the movie *The Passion of The Christ*, praying those around me would see their need for the Savior. As I type those words, I choke at my own spiritual better-than-you attitude that permeated me.

As I settled into my seat, it was then that I “heard” the Lord speak to my heart ... “I don’t want you to think about what I did for **them** ... I want you to think what I have done for **you**.” So, it was with that unexpected mindset I took in, moment by painful moment, the price my Lord paid for ME. For MY sin.

As the movie came to an end, I sat in stunned silence. Making my way out of the theater, the words of Isaiah the prophet played like a mental loop in my mind ... “He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, He bore our shame...” My iniquities. My lying, my lust and my idolatry. My hatred. My shame.

Arriving home, I nearly ran to the kitchen, where I grabbed my Bible that had been lying on the counter and began reading out loud, Isaiah 53. As tears streamed, and in barely a whisper, I choked out the words ... *Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, O that I could express to You the depth of my gratitude ... the gift You bought with Your life's blood I could never repay ....*

*Stony Paths*

That prayer became the Easter poem you see below. Recall again the price He paid, the love He showed and the mercy He has granted. To YOU. To ME. And praise Him!



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I'm just one beggar telling another  
beggar where to find bread

D. T. Niles

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# MY JESUS

*Jesus, Jesus, Jesus ...*

*O, that I could express to You the depth of my gratitude.*

*The gift You gave, bought with Your life's blood,*

*I could never repay.*

*Your flesh ripped ... Your face slapped ... Your body pierced ...*

*You willingly suffered such torment,*

*For me ... how can that be?*

*It was my sin ... not Yours, my guilt and shame ... not Yours.*

***Yet You traded,***

*Giving me Your righteousness*

*And taking on Yourself the guilt of my sin.*

*O, Jesus ... Jesus ... Jesus*

*I surrender my life to You as an offering.*

*A token so small ... for the One Who gave me His all.*

*Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,*

*O, that I could express to You*

*The depth of my gratitude ....*

*My Lord, my God and my King ....*

# EVEN THOUGH AND EVEN IF AND EVEN WHEN

*He who did not withhold or spare [even] His own Son but gave Him up for us all, will He not also with Him freely and graciously give us all [other] things? Romans 8:32 AMPC*

**Even though .... even if .... even when ....** learning to trust God, not for a particular outcome but to simply trust Him. If we're honest with ourselves, we'll admit that, that is no light task.

Over the decades, I've held this topic of trusting God up to the light, gazing intently at each angle and crevice through the lens of His Word.

Recently, I faced a near fatal health crisis, but in His faithfulness and flawless timing, the Lord revealed the problem days before it may have cost me my life. He tenderly protected my physical heart as He had cared for and protected my emotional heart over the decades. I am in awe of His goodness toward me and my husband and family.

Yet, in the midst of sharing with others God's goodness toward me, I felt a twinge as I spoke. What if God had allowed me to die? Would He be any less good? What if the person I'm sharing my good news with has tragically lost someone? Also, I realize there are those who believe that if God were truly good, He would prevent all perceived tragedy from happening in the first place.

He who gave the life of His Son for me, for you, deserves our trust. Though nearly blasphemous to say, **He has earned our trust as a first response.** Yes, there are times we do not understand the

why of a tragedy or heartache, but when those times occur, we must turn our eyes to Him who loved us so thoroughly and choose to trust. Trust in His goodness. Trust that He is faithful. Trust that He is in complete control. Trust that every tragedy allowed into the life of a follower of Christ is sent/allowed with/for great purpose.

This doesn't mean we don't acknowledge our pain and heartache and questions. Too many of us learned wrongly to stuff our pain rather than admit it. It *does* mean that with the help of His Holy Spirit, we come full circle – bowing the knee and heart as we acknowledge along with Job, “I'm not God. I'm not even God jr. You know what You're doing.” (Becky's paraphrase).

*“Unbelief sees God through circumstances – faith puts God between itself and circumstances.”* - Unknown

So, whether the Lord has miraculously moved on your behalf or allowed great tragedy (or somewhere in between), join me in worshipping the Lord God and shouting from the rooftops, “I trust You Lord! This hurts like crazy, but I trust You.”

*Father God, I am in awe of Your goodness and of Your sovereign control over all things. Use all I face to bring You glory and encourage others to trust You no matter the circumstance. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## FAMILY DINNER

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*



*When you open your hand, you satisfy the hunger and thirst of every living thing.*

Psalm 23: 5a Psalm 145:16 NLT

Our monthly family dinner is a time of beautifully controlled chaos. Bursting with good food and loud conversation and chattering grandkids and craziness and drama and laughter and spilled drinks ... and *family*. Talk of the latest ball game or promotions or inevitable life challenges can be heard mingled with the sounds of forks mindlessly hitting the plate to entwine bites of homemade spaghetti and meatballs. Family dinner in all it's beautiful chaos. We love it.

As I read Psalm 23, I was struck that God prepares a table for us, but unlike the family dinner table, this table is prepared for us in the presence of *our enemies*. Right there, smack in the middle of enemies, our Lord is able to treat us to a meal. Enabling us to relax and sit at His table that's overflowing with His peace, His presence, His provision. Not by removing the "enemies" but right there in their presence. In spite of them.

What "enemy" is in your presence today?

Grief. Loss. Rejection. Illness. Financial collapse. Fear. Despair. "What if" or "Why" questions ... the Lord has prepared a table for you, for me ... *right there*. Right smack in the middle of real-life.

Yet whether or not we sit and enjoy His offerings is our choice. We can be so distracted by the enemy that we miss His table all together. Or perhaps we're waiting for the enemies of life to go away before sitting down to the table of His peace and presence and provision.

During family dinner, I can easily get so focused on the meal and spills and serving, that I neglect the gift of family right in front of me. As we encounter the enemies of life, we too can become so focused on coping or "doing" that we neglect the table He has prepared for us right there in the middle of our enemies.

Practically speaking, what does "sitting at His table" look like? A simple prayer of "Help" (no need to get theological, just cry out to Him) then opening His Word to read aloud a Psalm (23 or 37 or 46 are great places to begin). Together, let's stop. Pull out a chair and sit at the table of His presence. Though there's probably no Italian meatballs on the menu, what our Father God offers is beyond any culinary delight. He opens His hand and offers us His very peace and provision to fully satisfy the longing soul.

*I do not shield you from hardship. I give you victory while in the throes of adversity. - Francis J. Roberts*

*Father, Thank You for Your provision - for Your table in the very presence of my enemies. Grow in me a depth of faith that is able to relax at Your table regardless of what swirls around. You are entirely faithful! How I love You! In Jesus'. Amen.*

# UNKNOWNNS OF LIFE

*He knows what is in the darkness ...*

*When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, You knew my path.*

*Daniel 2:22b NASB Psalm 142:3a NASB*

The unknown. We all fear it. We avoid situations that cause it. We try to prevent it. But it's unavoidable, isn't it? We have no idea what the traffic will be on our way home from work let alone the weighty unknowns of life. The unknown factors at work in our world, our country, our health or our families. Will a spouse walk out? Will a pink slip be handed us? Will a terminal diagnosis be given? Try as we might, there is no adequate preparation for the pain and shock of such unknowns. For such times of darkness. Darkness that has the capacity to cause us to feel overwhelmed by the fear of the unknown.

As I pondered the idea of the unknowns of life, my eyes fell on this, circled and highlighted in orange, sentence in my Bible; "**He knows what is in the darkness.**" Though I don't recall why I highlighted the verse – at this moment, it jumped off the page at me. His Spirit speaking directly to me. "**Becky, I know.**" My Father knows what the darkness conceals. He knows my path, He illumines my darkness. He knows. I found genuine comfort embedded in that reminder.

The unknowns, the around-the-corner issues of life are like a darkness that conceals what we desperately want to know. What's next on the agenda of life's challenges? A toddler's sniffles or a marriage in distress? A cancer diagnosis or a broken-down car? A career move or a sudden death? A child's rebellion or an

out-of-my-comfort-zone season? Whatever the “darkness”, He sees, He is aware.

Whatever form of darkness you’re facing today, trust the One who sees into the dark unknown and follow His lead through the murkiness of your circumstance.

*If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night, “even the darkness is not dark to you the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. Psalm 139:11-12 ESV*

*“Now, I know in my experience that Jesus’ light is stronger than the biggest darkness.” - Corrie ten Boom*

*My Father, Try as I might, I can’t “prepare” for every potential difficulty that may occur (And You know I try!). Grant me the ability to rest in the knowledge that You see into the darkness of my challenges and have already made provision for all that will come my way. You are never caught off guard. Thank You Father! In Jesus’ name, Amen*

# STRENGTH FOR THE WEARY ONE

*Encourage the exhausted, strengthen the weary,*

*say to those with an anxious heart, "Take courage. Fear not."*

*He gives strength to the weary and to him who lacks might (strength), He increases power.*

*Isaiah 35:3-4a Isaiah 40:29 NASB*

It's been said that most of us can endure just about anything as long as it's short in duration. As long as we see a glimmer of light at the end of the proverbial tunnel. But when the light we hoped for is really an on-coming-train version of a trial or a you've-got-to-be-kidding-me challenge, we fall to our emotional knees. Exhausted and weary. Hoping and praying for a quick ending, we suddenly realize there are no magic wands to wave away real life. Real pain. Real heartache.

If our country's chasm-deep divide isn't enough, if a potentially life-threatening viral pandemic isn't enough and if financial uncertainties aren't enough to be a recipe for flat-out weariness ... throw in regular 'ol life challenges such as relationship issues, parenting, loss, rejection, death, divorce and loneliness ... the almost inevitable result -Weary. Exhausted. No strength.

Recently, I walked through just such a trial with a loved one. A trial that caused my eyes to dart about the tunnel of difficulty for a glimmer of hoped-for light. My tunnel of difficulty didn't suddenly burst with the light of a miraculous removal of pain. As I emotionally peered into the quiet darkness of difficulty, unsure of what might lay ahead ... I could "hear" my Lord's voice speak.



*He gives strength to the weary.*

*He encourages the exhausted.*

*He increases power to those who lack might.*

Though I much prefer a problem-free life, that's seldom borne out in our real-world experiences. And because that is the case, He lavishes His strength on us and in us. He encourages us from the inside out when there is no good reason to be encouraged, He infuses power into these power-less vessels of ours. He sustains the weary one.

Whether your present trial is an ongoing pebble-in-the-shoe irritation, a soul-deep ache of pain or the death of \_\_\_\_\_. His grace is sufficient. His strength is perfect. I know ... you would rather He remove your pain, remove your trial. He may. But whatever He chooses – trust Him. Whatever it looks like. No matter the whispered lies of the enemy or your own mind that tells you otherwise ... trust the One Who freely gave the life of His Son on your behalf, to hold no good thing back from you.

*“If it is to be a great miracle, the condition is not difficulty, but impossibility.” – Streams in the Desert.*

*My Father, How my heart aches at what I see and hear. Please, infuse your mighty strength into me as I speak out loud – You are good, and You are faithful. I trust You! In Jesus' mighty name, Amen.*

## BONE-OUT-OF-JOINT

*I, even I, will rend and go on [rending]; I will carry off and there will be no one to deliver.*

*I will return to My place [on high] until they acknowledge their offense and feel their guilt and seek My face; in their affliction and distress they will seek, inquire for, and require Me earnestly, saying, Come and let us return to the Lord, for He has torn so that He may heal us;*

*He has stricken so that He may bind us up.*

Hosea 5:14-15, Hosea 6:1 (see also Job 5:18, Duet. 32:39, Isaiah 30:26b, Lam. 3:32-33)

Some years ago, I received a panicked and barely audible phone call from my dad. It was eventually determined that the cause of dad's piercing pain was a dislocated shoulder he'd experienced during a fall hours earlier. Once the skilled hands of the doctor put his shoulder back in place, the pain was gone. Such intense pain from one dislocated bone. It had my dad's full attention ... it had *my* full attention!

Through the OT Prophet Hosea, we read that the LORD Himself allowed great difficulty with the Divine purpose of grabbing the attention of His people. Their bone-out-of-joint situation was to prod them to recognize that sin had once again enslaved them. Such recognition was meant to draw them back to the LORD their God for forgiveness and healing.

Authentic love, must at times, allow pain.

I have found that oftentimes, through the circumstances of our lives, God will allow a bone-out-of-joint situation to grab our full, undivided attention. So "painful" and all-consuming that we are driven to bend the knee and seek His face. Such pains may come in the form of a life disappointment, a job loss, a relationship

severed or a sin exposed. A financial reversal, the death of a loved one or dashed expectations. **This I know, when the pain comes, it's my cue to seek His face.**

As with God's people of old, it may be a literal sin that He's calling you to repent of.

He may be redirecting your path for a new season of life.

He may be calling forth a deeper level of trust in Him.

He may be allowing such pain to impart a depth of sincere empathy in your spirit for those around you.

He may use pain to reveal (or remind you of) your own brokenness, so with renewed humility you extend grace to others.

This I know, when the pain comes, it's our cue to seek His face.

*Father God, Your Word says, "In quietness and trust is my strength." Enable me to trust You, Father, in the midst of life's challenges, even as I bend my knee and seek Your face. Cause me to see what You are accomplishing in and through my situation – For Your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen*

*Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world. -C.S. Lewis*

# CHICKEN SOUP

*For we are a fragrance of Christ to God.*

*For He has torn us, but He will heal us;  
He has wounded us, but He will bandage us.*

2 CORINTHIANS 2:15A NASB HOSEA 6:1 NASB

I enjoy cooking, *and my husband and I love to eat*, homemade chicken noodle soup. Before we can indulge in this culinary treat, I have to boil and then de-bone the chicken. Without fail, once heat is applied, there is this not-sure-what-to-call-it yucky scum that rises to the surface. As the temperature rises, again and again, it must be skimmed off. It takes time and a little work but the result is definitely worth the effort. Delicious chicken soup.

Let me ask you, *has God turned up the heat in your life?* Have you felt like that piece of chicken in my soup-pot? Temperature rising and no way of escape? Is it possible that the Lord is bringing some I-don't-know-what-you-call-it-but-it's-gross scum to the surface in your life?

Greed

Self-pity

Unforgiveness

Materialistic attitude

Workaholism

Perfectionism

Pride

Fear

(I know because I have *my own* "scum" list!)

He allows the heat to *purify*. To *cleanse*. To *bring us to the end of ourselves*. We flinch. We cry out, "Stop! This hurts!" And yet, He continues. Once the process is complete – we exude the very fragrance of Christ. And we stand astonished at the beauty He has created through the flames of our difficulties. Simply

astounding! And just like my chicken soup, though it takes some heat and time, the result is well worth the effort.

*Father,*

*No religious prayers about how much I appreciate the trials of life...I don't like them one bit! But I trust, You, Father. And I want to honor You, in and, through my life. So, turn the heat up if You must – as long as I have the assurance of Your presence and Your strength for the journey. In Jesus' mighty name. Amen*



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In God I have put my trust, I will not  
be afraid. What can man do to me?

Psalm 56:11

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# HE HEARS YOU – YES, YOU!

*For He has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither has He hidden His face from him, but when he cried to Him, He heard.*

*The Lord hears when I call to Him.*

Psalm 22:24 AMP Psalm 4:3 NASB

As I poured over this verse from Psalm 22, two words stopped me cold, almost as if they were highlighted on the pages of my Bible ... **He heard.** *He heard...*

I cry ... *and He hears.* Unbelievable. He's listening to me ... *to you.* I can't even get a sales clerk to listen to me yet God listens? Astounding. Scripture says He doesn't just tolerate my ramblings and guttural cries for help ... He hasn't hidden Himself from me, He actually hears me. *Me.* He hears *You.* How can that be? Fall-on-your-face-in-awe, amazing.

According to Scripture, our Father God listens as we bring to Him the challenges of run-down cars, dead-end jobs, broken hearts, empty cupboards or lonely nights. We cry...He hears. Listen Beloved ... He hears you when you call, He sees your tears. He is closer than your breath. (Isaiah 65:24, Psalm 56:8, Psalm 139, Jeremiah 33:3, Jeremiah 23:23-24)

Do you need reminded of this truth today dear one? Whatever you're facing today, Beloved, the Lord Jesus Christ is listening. Call to Him who sits on the throne and know with certainty that He's hearing every word ... even words spoken only by your heart's cry. He hears – YOU!

*Father God,  
Face to the floor astounding. You. Hear. Me. Thank You for Your  
intimate care for me and what concerns me, this day. I cry out to  
You with the knowledge, and assurance, that You hear me when I  
call and will act on my behalf. Forgive and help my unbelief.  
In Jesus' name, Amen*



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The woe...and the tears of life belong  
to the interlude – not the finale.

F.B. Meyer

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# TOOTHACHES

*He delivers the afflicted in their affliction and opens their ears [to His voice] in adversity.*

*But God saves those who suffer through their suffering; he gets them to listen through their pain.*

Job 36:15 AMP and NCV

*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted, he saves those whose spirits are crushed.*

Psalms 34:18 CEB

When I have a throbbing toothache, my whole body seems to be one giant tooth! It's all I can think about, it's all I focus on. There's nothing like pain to narrow our focus and get our attention is there? C.S. Lewis put it this way, "*Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.*"

I wish it were not so, but it is. God often uses pain to get our attention – or more accurately for today's scripture – *get our ear*. It's when all hell is breaking loose in our life that we are ready and willing to listen to our Father ... *or is it just me?* I hate to admit it, but I usually don't pay *close attention* when the bills are paid, the health is great and no major issues brewing with those I love. More often, it's a season of pain that grabs my attention ... my ear....

When the pain is deep and trauma wide God has promised to uniquely open our ears. Open to His voice of direction or correction. Open to His voice of encouragement or discipline. In our pain we hear His call to come closer and "Be still and know He is God." We hear His tender word that says, "Trust Me, child. I sit as King over the flood of your circumstances; I declare the



end from the beginning. I will not fail you. I AM the God of all comfort.”

Our pain grants us a willingness of heart that pleasures seem unable to accomplish. A willingness to stop and listen to our Father, a willingness to spiritually speaking, “go to the dentist” and allow the Lord Jesus to do His work in us. Our pain, in His hands, is an invaluable instrument wielded by the Master Physician.

If your circumstances are causing you to writhe in pain, ask the Lord to give you ears to hear His voice and comfort you with the knowledge that He is using your pain...for you. For those around you. He will not fail you.

*Oh my Father, At times the “pain” throbs nearly unbearably intense. My circumstances attempt to overwhelm me. Grant me ears to hear Your voice. Use this pain to open my ears to Your comfort, direction and even correction. I bow in worship to You my Lord and my God. I love You, Father. In Jesus’ mighty name, Amen*

## LAWN LINES

*There is a way that seems right to a man and appears straight before him, but at the end of it is the way of death. Proverbs 16:25 AMPC*



*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight or understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make straight your path. Proverbs 3:5-6 AMPC*

My husband is very particular about our lawn. He spends most summer weekends manicuring the green carpet to perfection. No weeds, golf-course style trimmed and perfect lines. So, I felt pretty good about myself when he gave up the task a few times last summer and let me do the mowing. Let's just say, our neighbors could tell the difference! No matter what I did, I couldn't get perfectly straight lines like my husband always seemed to create. Then I remembered something I'd once read about how pioneers used to plow their fields in straight lines and I began applying it to my mowing. Before you know it, straight lines began appearing!

The pioneer plowman would focus on a distant, though straight-ahead tree or a fence post. Not diverting his gaze from the fixed point ahead, he resisted the temptation to watch the plow. Trusting the fixed point to guide him rather than what appeared straight. Such focus enabled him to successfully plow straight lines.

In our own lives, it's so easy to take our eyes off the distant fence-post of God's Word, relying instead on our own understanding

rather than His Truth as revealed in His Word. Oh so subtly, our focus begins drifting (not unlike my lawn lines!), as we start trusting our own insight – trusting what we see, or hear or feel or what’s popular rather than His Word. And before you know it, we have crooked lines of confusion, anxiety and fear. Crooked lines of bad decisions and broken relationships. And if not corrected, crooked lines that lead us to eternal consequences.

God’s Word reminds us that there is a way that seems straight and right, but at the end of it is the way of death. He tells us to trust Him with all our heart and not to rely on our own insight or understanding. Simply put – He wants to be the fixed point we gaze at, the “fence-post” we trust in. And cautions us of the danger in trusting in ourselves.

*God’s Word reminds us that there is a way that seems straight and right, but at the end of it is the way of death.*

My husband never once complained about my lack of mowing skills, always showing me grace as he smiled and said “thank you.” How much more our heavenly Father will respond with grace to us as we ask Him to help us shift our trust back to Him and the authentic Truth found His Word.

*My Lord, It’s so easy to drift away from the Truths found in Your Word, and Oh so slowly begin trusting my perception of things instead. Please forgive me and enable me to fix my gaze straight ahead – to You. Thank You! In Jesus name, Amen.*

## FEAR?

*So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when **the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews.** Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you."*

*Peace I leave with you; My [own] peace I now give and bequeath to you.*

John 10:19 NASB John 14:27 AMP

Has an everyday challenge morphed into a seemingly hopeless circumstance? Has a crisis become an unexpected tragedy? Have your best laid plans fallen apart before you? Have your expectations been dashed by reality? Are you bent low in emotional pain even as the world sees you "standing" deceptively tall? Has something brought you to a room "with the doors locked for fear?"

*Political chaos*

*Loneliness*

*Isolation*

*Relational struggles*

*Emotional trauma*

*The unknown*

O precious one – The only Sovereign, the Omnipotent One, the Lord Jesus Christ, stands in *your* midst. In the midst of *your* tragedy, *your* crisis, *your* fear, *your* worse-case-scenario

and speaks, "Peace be with you." Receive that today. I don't know what you're walking through or what crisis has caused you to "close and lock the door" in fear, but I encourage you to trust His \*Word more than what you see around you. The enemy wants us cringing in fear as if our Lord had been caught by surprise...He has not. He is aware and has already made provision. Dear one, stand in His Peace as the storm swirls and then passes.

*Peace be with you. My soul finds rest in God alone. Psalm 62:1*

*Father, Cause Your peace to overflow and overtake our soul! I exhale in peaceful calm.... not because the storm has ended but because You are in it with us and are in complete control. I choose to walk in Your Peace. Thank You Father. In Jesus' name, Amen*

*\*If you're not sure where to begin in the Bible, start with the Gospel of John or the New Testament book of Romans. If you're looking for comfort and encouragement, start with the Old Testament Book of Psalms.*

# CHRISTMAS COOKIES

*The LORD of Armies has taken an oath: "It will happen exactly as I've intended. It will turn out exactly as I've planned.*



*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

Isaiah 14:24 GWT Romans 8:28 KJV

Every December, it's the same pre-Christmas cookie-baking ritual. Pulling out my bowls and measuring spoons along with flour, baking soda, salt, brown sugar, butter, vanilla and eggs – I spend an entire day mixing, and refrigerating batches of cookie dough. I'll spend another whole day baking and decorating (and taste-testing of course!) until our kitchen counters are covered in sugary goodness.

In the midst of my baking marathon, I stepped back to survey the landscape of my countertop. I noticed that most of what my eyes landed on wouldn't taste very good as a stand-alone ingredient. Baking soda or a pinch of salt isn't very tasty all by itself, however, mix each ingredient together in the correct order, add some heat and voila! You have a mouth-watering, hip-enlarging Christmas cookie! As I mixed and stirred this year's cookie-dough, I thought a lot about the "ingredients" of my life ... ***of most people's lives*** and how similar it is to my Christmas cookie routine.

On a stand-alone basis, many of the ingredients we encounter are bitter, or even down right painful. Some appear as pointless as baking soda or a pinch of salt. At times were convinced the oven temperature is set on broil ... *oh the pain of the heat* of trials or testing or even natural consequences of our own bad choices.

In my own life, the Lord God has taken “ingredients” like childhood challenges, the death of two of my children, domestic violence, divorce and even my own addictions ... and in the end, brought them all together for my good and His glory. Ingredients that I thought were unnecessary or an “oven” temperature I thought was too hot or “baking time” I thought was too long ... *He brought good from them all. Not one ingredient wasted.*

Your ingredient list or baking time, may be similar to mine or completely different. Maybe it includes the bitter flavor of COVID or the nastiness of depression-inducing isolation or the uncertainty of our political landscape or financial anxiety.

Right now, may be your time of “mixing” of ingredients, or “the heat of the oven” or maybe you are enjoying the finished-for-the-moment taste of His masterpiece creation. Wherever you’re at in the process and whatever your ingredient list, let me encourage you today to rest on the authority of His Word that He will indeed cause all things to work together for your good and His glory... trust Him, your end result will be just as He planned.

Grab yourself a cup of coffee and a few cookies... and reflect a minute on how He so masterfully used/uses all your life's ingredients for your good and His glory. Astounding.

*"Faith isn't the ability to believe long and far into the misty future. It's simply taking God at His Word and taking the next step." — Joni Erickson Tada*

*Father,*

*I am amazed at Your ability to take all the ingredients of our life and somehow, some way, create beauty. How can we thank You precious Lord, except by offering our life back to You. We love You! In Jesus' name, Amen*

# GOD MEANS IT FOR GOOD

*As for you, you meant evil against me but God meant it for good to bring about this present result.*

Genesis 50:20 NASB

As the story of Joseph's life unfolds, we find a young man excited about the future God has for him. From the dreams given, and readily shared with his family, we can see God has a super-sized future in mind for him! But his big brothers weren't so impressed with their kid brother and his dreams of valor. When their contempt began brimming over for this "little dreamer" as they called him, they hatched a plot to take his life. In the end, rather than kill him, they sold him to traveling merchants. ***Selling him into a life of slavery.***

So much for a God-ordained, super-sized future. So much for dreams of God's call on his life. He must have misunderstood. He must have heard God all wrong.

*Not quite.* God often uses the unlikely, the ordinary and the downright painful to bring about His purposes for our lives. Trace out the path God providentially wove - *Joseph would have never become prime minister of Egypt if he had not been sold into slavery.*

Read the entire story. (See Genesis 37-50) See how again and again, the pain filled and profoundly unfair events in Joseph's life are nothing less than stepping-stones masterfully placed by God to fulfill one man's destiny. To place him exactly *where* he's needed, *when* he's needed. Joseph understands this truth as he



boldly declares on four occasions, “God sent me here. He sent me ahead of you.” God is in charge. Period. Pain and all.

*Create my destiny and then guide me into it for Your name’s sake and for Your pleasure. I trust You to create my life’s story and to give me all I need to fully live out the path You have planned for me. - Tony Evans*

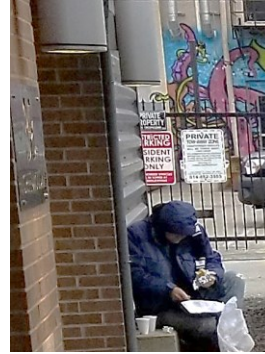
Beloved, who are the “older brothers” in *your* life? Have you been “sold into slavery” of some kind? Has something or someone caused you to believe that God’s promises are for everyone else but you? As if you, and your circumstances, are the one exception? Listen to me dear one, “they” may have meant it for evil but God meant it for good, to bring about His call on your life. Your pain may very well be God’s stepping-stones for the destiny He has planned.

*Father, Grant us a stepping-stone mentality on the trials that swirl around us. It’s so easy to feel like we’re the one exception to all You’ve promised. We choose to take one step at a time into the future You have planned for us, knowing that You hold our right hand. Thank You for your great faithfulness! In Jesus’ name, Amen*

# THANKS-GIVING

*We give thanks to you, O God; we give thanks, for your name is near. We recount your wondrous deeds... Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.*

Psalm 75:1 ESV 1 Thessalonians  
5:18 NLT/ESV



Be thankful. Be grateful. Give thanks. Those phrases get tossed around quite a bit during the Thanksgiving holiday season. Heck, I have plaques all over my kitchen shouting it! Yet these expressions can ring incredibly hollow when this is your first holiday after the death of a child, or a spouse or a parent ... *or a marriage*. Or you're in a locked prison cell, or overwhelmed with loneliness forged by a pandemic. Or your lap doubles as a dinner "table" as you sit outside along a curb eating while others pass by – ignoring your existence ... even the loneliness of monotony can rob us of a thankful heart.

Rather than anticipating laughter and fun around the family dinner table – some anticipate pain, heartache, loneliness and loss. **Yet** ... oh dear one ... allow me to oh so gently encourage you.

This Thanksgiving Day, I encourage you ... *be thankful*. Even if that means giving thanks in spite of your present crisis. In spite of your difficulties. In spite of crushed dreams and expectations. In spite of your pain. When all is stripped away – His great love is enough to be thankful for. Don't allow this season to be overshadowed by a pandemic, "Black Friday" or Turkey Day or whatever else the world has morphed this holiday

into. Give thanks to and for the One who holds your very breath in His loving hands and gave the life of His Son for us.

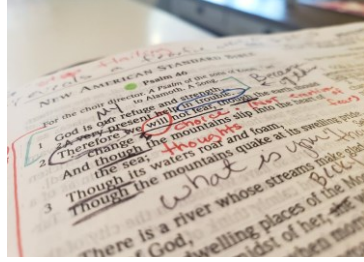
Search if you must. Sift through the debris of your life if that's what it takes – but find something and then give thanks. Even if it's being thankful for the transforming power of pain ....

*If WWII Nazi concentration camp survivor, Corrie ten Boom, could thank God for fleas/lice in her prison bunk, surely, we can find something to thank Him for.*

*Magnificent Father, giver of all good gifts, thank You for saving me and lavishing me with such things as peace in the midst of difficulty, calm in the midst of storms and security in the midst of such uncertainty. Enable me to focus on what You have blessed me with rather than what I perceive as lack. You are good and You are faithful. How I love You! In Jesus' name. Amen*

## Stony Paths

I am just checking in again ... Is hope still a four-letter word or are you leaning into Him as you walk your stony path? Have you found Him faithful to provide you just the right “shoes”? Would you consider journaling your thoughts below?



Take a minute and read Psalm 46 out loud...Try personalizing it by reading “God is MY Refuge and strength...”

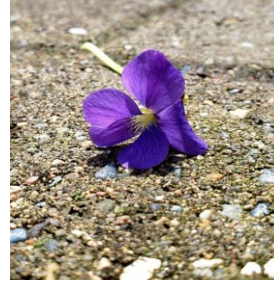
What is your “though”?

How do you walk out “Be still and know I am God”?

# WOUNDS THAT HEAL

*Can he have followed far who has no wound nor scar - Amy Carmichael*

As of this writing, it was 41 years ago (May 14th 1980) at about 6:20 am ... my 3 day old baby girl died. *She died ....*



I can still smell the fragrance of her newborn baby skin and the softness of her delicate hands and fingertips as they curled around my finger. The tragedy and guttural pain of that day is seared in my mind and memory – leaving a scar as real as any branding iron. Her short life ended in part due to my drug use and poor nutrition – and being barely 15 years old. The pain of her death was made even worse because of the guilt I felt in her passing. I vividly recall holding her now lifeless body and whimpering through tears, “Look what I’ve done ...” there are no words to describe the anguish a parent feels when a child dies, which is magnified beyond measure when our actions were part of that outcome. I share that very personal and deeply painful memory because something else happened on that day 41 years ago.

The nurses were so kind to allow me time alone in a room with a rocking chair and my little one, who I named Tiffany Anne. In that room, I held her, rocked her and cried. Buckets of tears. Finally, I told God, “If You’re really there, and I’m not so sure You are...but if You are ... would You help me?” That horrific day, I surrendered my life to Jesus Christ. I had no idea what I was doing, but our God is true to His Word, He promises that if we seek Him with our whole heart, we will find Him. I found Jesus

## Stony Paths

Christ alone in a hospital room at Children's hospital as I cradled my little one.

While there were no magic wands to wave away all the bad choices I had already made or would continue to struggle with for years to come – He has faithfully walked with me through it all. Walking out in real life the Truth that He does indeed “*Cause all things to work together for our good and His glory.*” *Romans 8:28*

As you and I struggle through the current pandemic crisis or political crisis or your own Wound-that-heals scenario – I'm reminding you as I remind myself – He is no less faithful today as He was 41 years ago ... not to necessarily remove our trials but to walk us through them. And wonder of wonders, bring good from them along the way.

*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. Genesis 50:20 NIV*

*Father, Precious Savior - My heart still aches with the memory and heartache – yet I am grateful beyond words that it's only “Till we meet again” – not goodbye. And I am blown away at Your ability to bring such good from such tragedy. To have the honor of honoring You ... I love You – In Jesus' mighty name, Amen.*

**R**ecently I shared the following “Santa Claus” devotion to a group of volunteers at the Columbus Dream Center and was met with this question: “So, Becky, what does “trust God” look like?” Allow me to briefly share how I responded to that very important question before you read “Santa Claus.”

*First, I’ll tell you what it’s NOT – It’s not a religious response to real-life trials. It’s not pretending the challenge isn’t there or that the pain is not real.*

*Trust in the Lord God looks like tears flowing as you whisper a prayer of “help!” or praying even as you are emotionally numb from the duration of a trial. It looks like praying for that adult child, laying them in His hands **one more time**. It’s admitting to the Lord that your faith is shot as you peer into the reality of an addiction overtaking someone you love. It looks like turning **TO** God when your mind and all you see tells you to give up and turn **FROM** Him.*

*In the end, it’s clinging to the one thing we **DO** know – If He gave the life of His Son for us (dirty-rotten as we are), surely, He has earned our trust when nothing else makes sense.*

*Merry Christmas dear one!*

## SANTA CLAUS?

*“Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

*The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.*

*Matthew 18:3 Proverbs 15:3 ESV*

“He sees you when you're sleeping, He knows when you're awake, He knows if you've been bad or good, So be good for goodness sake!” Why? “Because Santa Claus is comin’ to town!” How many parents have used that song to encourage children to do everything from clean their rooms to being kind to their siblings? I know I did! And it worked, you know why? Children are naturally trusting. Assured that if they brush their teeth without being told or put their dinner plate in the sink, that somehow, on Christmas morning they will find an over-flow of packages under the tree. All placed there by a jolly ‘ol man dressed in red and smoking a pipe.

*After all, Mom and Dad said so ....*

Because our God is not a mere myth Who bribes us to be good, or a make-believe character that cannot stand the rigors of searching out the Truth of His existence. ... my analogy breaks down before I even begin, yet there is a lesson to be pulled from this Norman Rockwell Christmas scene.

Encapsulated in one word. *Trust.*

Trust when His silence is deafening, when the loneliness is unbearable, when the diagnosis is what you feared, when the





answer is “no.” Trust Him, when difficult circumstances remain, when sudden trials envelop or hopelessness is palatable. Trust Him. With child-like faith. Trust the Lord God who gave the life of His Son for us, born on Christmas Day. Born to die in our place.

He is at work in your circumstance because you asked Him to be. You may not see the answer right now, but take Him at His word, with child-like faith. Don’t allow what you see (or don’t see) to cast a shadow over His faithfulness.

Children trust that they will find presents under the tree – yet there is no evidence of packages anywhere to be found – until the Christmas morning rampage! Our Lord is calling us to a child-like trust that He is good and He is faithful, that He loves us. That He is moved to action by our prayers.

*Prayer is the most tangible expression of trust in God.*

*- Jerry Bridges*

*Father God,*

*Thank You that You are at work in the situations I have brought to You – Behind the scenes of what my eyes can see, You are in complete control – come what may... I trust You!*

## CHRISTMAS SOCKS

*Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given...*

*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life.*

Isaiah 9:6    John 3:16



*Christmas.* I love the lights, the tinsel, the songs, and the food. I love the cheesy nothing-to-do-with-the-real-meaning-of-Christmas movies. I love baking cookies with the grandkids and watching the excitement in their eyes as they gasp excitedly at Grandpa and Grandma's covered-in-icicles Christmas tree. But none of these things is really Christmas, is it? In fact, one of those decades-old movies I love, reminds us that Christmas can, and does, happen even when all those extras are missing.

*Old socks became Christmas socks in our family.* Old socks nailed to the wall as Christmas stockings, plump with fruit and candy, old socks used as mittens for the kid's snowball fights and old socks turned into bean bag toys and hand puppets. During those years of leanness and difficulty, God gave us a heart of thankfulness for such blessings as old socks – while in recent years, I have spent Christmas' basking in the outward blessings of tinsel, lights, cheesy movies and grandkids – all shared with my gift-from-God husband and family.

But no matter what, I always had *Christmas*. Because Christmas isn't about those outer trappings we so enjoy.

While we could debate the origins of celebrating this Holy Day we call Christmas, or the accuracy of the *exact* date – let's land on the meaning of what we are celebrating. God made flesh. Born of a woman. The Creator entering into His creation *to save them*. No lights or tinsel or cookies or even eggnog needed. **Jesus the Christ, born into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. That is Christmas.**

This Christmas may find you comfortably sitting in your favorite chair, sipping hot chocolate and basking in the glow of a tree or alone in a prison cell (physical or emotional), tear-stained face and discouraged beyond words. It may find you missing a now-in-heaven child/parent/spouse/friend/sibling... or it may find you feverishly trying to “create” Christmas for family. My prayer is that this Christmas we purposefully remember what we are celebrating – the greatest \*gift of all time. The gift of His one and only Son ... *for you. For me ...* Amazing. Grace.

*The very purpose of Christ's coming into the world was that he might offer up his life as a sacrifice for the sins of men. He came to die. This is the heart of Christmas.* -Rev. Billy Graham

*Father, I am speechless when I think of what You have given us...Your Son, Your only Son. I bow at Your feet, acknowledging Your goodness, faithfulness and absolute mercy and grace given to one such as I. Thank You Father, thank You. In Jesus' name, Amen*

\*(Make sure you open *this* gift before YOUR expiration date or it will do you as much good as those expired gift cards!).

# EVEN IF HE DOESN'T

We had hoped He was The One ... *Luke 24:21*

*Lord, if You had been here .... John 11:21*

***Even if He doesn't ... Daniel 3:18 NLT***

*And we know that God causes all things to work together for our good and His glory. Romans 8:28 Becky's version*

Though several years ago now, the emotion and memory of it is like it happened just yesterday ....

As I read and reread the text on my phone screen, the lump in my throat grew and the tears began to well as what-if thoughts engulfed me ... "this can't be. *Please Lord ...*" Reminding myself that God is able to do above and beyond all that I could dare ask for or imagine, I tearfully, though confidently, prayed for my loved one. Certain that "A" would be the outcome of this crisis and not "B." *I was just sure ...*"

As sure as the disciples were that Jesus was **The One** – the long-awaited Messiah.

As sure as Joseph, when God gave him lofty dreams of royalty and influence for his future.

As sure as Mary and Martha, when they sent word for Jesus to come quickly and heal their brother.

As sure as the three Hebrew slaves that God would deliver them in their fiery furnace crisis.

*Yet Jesus was wrongfully convicted and then crucified.*

*Yet Joseph became a slave and then a forgotten prisoner.*

*Yet the three Hebrews were thrown into the fiery furnace.*

*Yet Lazarus died.*

And yet my heart broke as I watched “**B**” unfold in the life of someone I love.

Listening in on the three Hebrew slaves, who were eventually thrown into the fiery pit – they made this mic-drop statement to the mad tyrant who seemingly held their life in his hands. “*Our God is well able to deliver us O King, **but even if He doesn’t**, we will not bow down to you or your image.*”

Did you catch that? ***Even if He doesn’t ... seriously? Where does a person get faith like that??***

Do I have the kind of faith that will carry me through *even-if-He-doesn’t* scenarios? Or is my faith resting on/dependent upon a particular outcome rather than in my Lord? Period. As I wrestled with the reality of what happened in my outcome “**B**” scenario, I came face to face with my own heart, a heart that felt like God had let me down. Dropped the ball. I realize it’s not spiritual to admit that, but it’s necessary ... it’s real. As the Lord and I walked through that painful conversation, in the end, I told Him, “*Father, even if this doesn’t change ... help me trust You. Lord, I choose to trust You. I know You are good. I know You are faithful. This circumstance doesn’t negate Who You are.*”

How about you beloved, has a “**B**” scenario come crashing through the door of your life? Has it shaken your faith in the Lord *or* has it caused you to drive your roots even deeper into Him? My challenge to each of us is to never allow our circumstances to drive our faith. We may not have all the answers, but we can choose to trust Him in the dark. He gave the life of His Son for us, surely He has “*earned*” our trust, ***even if He doesn’t ...***

*The same heat that melts wax, hardens clay.*

- *Anonymous*

*Precious Lord,*

*Would You take these outcome “B” scenarios and use them as instruments to deepen my trust in You? ... even if and even when ... no matter the outcome, You are so very worthy of my trust and face to the floor worship. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*



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Explanations are a substitute for trust.

Tullian Tchividjian

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# HANGRY

*“You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.”*

*“He satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry soul with goodness”*

*“Come, all who are thirsty.”*



Psalm 145:16 NASB Psalm 107:9 NKJ Isaiah 55:11 Berean Study Bible

*Hangry.* Such a driving hunger that it causes a serious attitude. Our oldest son is legendary for it. Thankfully, his wife is just as legendary for her Bar-B-Q chicken and homemade mac and cheese. *His* comfort food.

Our own personal comfort food usually beckons us from childhood, a dish that feels comfortable and familiar. Cozy, like an old chair. Mine is biscuits and gravy. Just the thought of mom’s homemade drop biscuits and bacon-grease sausage gravy is comforting (and causing a little hangriness!)

But if the wait is so long that I decide to fill that empty spot with a box of Little Debbie Peanut butter bars (not that I’ve ever done that), my hunger may be gone but in the long run it’s done me no real good. In fact, if I do that often enough, it just might clog an artery or two!

On a more serious note, oftentimes we fill our *hungry soul* with “what we know”, with what’s comfortable and familiar from childhood or destructive patterns we’ve learned as adults. Stuffing ourselves with porn, or achievements, or religiosity, or new anything, or relationships or busy-ness or entertainment, or sex outside of God’s clear boundaries. You get the idea. The spiritual equivalent to a box of little Debbies. It “tastes good” and

## Stony Paths

causes the emptiness to momentarily go away, but it provides no real value and even harms us in the long run.

God has graciously blessed us with a longing that only He can fill. It's what C.S. Lewis has called a God shaped hole. If we cry out to Him in all our emptiness, in the midst of all our attempts to fill that soul-hunger with what's familiar and comfortable ...He has promised to be our Bread of Life. Our Living water. Our Savior.

I encourage you to step back from the table of life, pay attention to what you're filling your longing soul with. If it is anything other than the Lord Jesus Christ, stop what you're doing and talk to Him about it. Right now.

“Come to Me, all who are thirsty...”

*Father,*

*It's easy to turn to what is familiar and comfortable – even when what's familiar is not what's best. Enable us to resist the temptation to fill our deepest longings with anything other than You. In Jesus' name, Amen*



# PEACE IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS

*And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. Revelation 21:5 KJV Behold, I come quickly. Revelation 22:7a KJV*

*For God has not given us a spirit of fearfulness, but one of power, love, and sound judgment. 2 Timothy 1:7 HCSB*

*Peace I leave with you; My [own] peace I now give and bequeath to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. [Stop allowing yourselves to be agitated and disturbed; and do not permit yourselves to be fearful and intimidated and cowardly and unsettled.] John 14:27 AMPC*

Chaos. Fear. Uncertainty. These are abounding in our world, our country and often even our own personal lives ... the enemy of our soul is desperate and driven to instill fear, chaos, panic or the dreaded “what-ifs” that would paralyze us. I’d love to offer a magic bullet or special prayer that would remove all the trials that swirls around us, but I cannot. What I can offer are four Biblical truths to wrap as a cloak around your spirit as the wind of chaos and fear whips around you.

**Truth #1 Jesus Christ is on the throne.** He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Not Satan, not the UN, not a political party, or even your boss/spouse/parent. The King has not stepped away for a coffee break only to return to find a hot-mess. He sits as King. When events feel out of control, remember Who is in complete control. Jesus Christ.

**Truth #2 There is more than one team on the field.** We have an enemy who hates us because we love Jesus Christ and who

never tires of trying to instill temptation, doubt and fear into our mind. *But God is greater.* Never forget that.

**Truth #3 Jesus Christ is coming again.** We haven't been left to ourselves...abandoned and alone. He who is faithful promised to return for His own. Just as He promised to come the first time to pay our penalty and die in our place, He has promised to come again. When tempted to hopelessness, call that to mind.

**Truth #4 God has not given us a spirit of fearfulness.** We are called to *resist fear* and *trust Him*. As closing time events unfold all around us, as birth-pang-like adversity grows greater by the day – we are told to look up, our redemption draws near. Our planet does indeed have a shelf-life. An Expiration date. And its Creator has already determined that day. We are to rest in His care, come what may, not cower in fear.

The chaos you're facing may be bubbling up from the floor of your life's circumstances, or a loved-one's challenges or, maybe the fear and chaos you face is from watching the evening news...However and whatever – recall these truths as you front-face the reality of our world today. In the midst of chaos, may you bask in His peace. Hallelujah! The King is Coming!

# THE BIBLE - TRUTH OR FICTION?

*Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.*

Proverbs 30:5 NASB



In all my writing I make the assumption that God's Word is true. Not a hope-so phrase. Not, "Think warm thoughts" nonsense that has no real value or meaning. But Truth. It is the very foundation for the encouragement I offer. Yet, I realize not everyone accepts that truth. So, in this "devotional" I am going to tackle the topic of God's Word and why it is the very bedrock of my life.

My devotions always begin with a Scripture. The foundation Stone. Not a man's opinion but God's Word. I make the assumption that the Bible, from Genesis's "In the beginning God created ... to Revelation's "Behold, I come quickly" Is Truth. Building on that as I share from His Word and my life's experiences.

Now for those who don't hold this view, my writings and speaking might seem like syrupy Christian nonsense or emotional-crutch-reading for the broken and needy or gullible. I stake my eternity on the Bible's validity. (In fact, everyone is gambling their eternity on one side of that coin or the other. There is no other option.)

Rather than opinion, I offer readers what God has to say on a matter. And the matter I usually speak on is what the Lord has taught/is teaching me the most about - adversity, trials and real-life difficulties. And most of all, how to walk **through** them honestly and with a focus on the One who holds my life in His hands. Wrestling out both the pain and His purpose.

Let me tell you how this absolute assurance in the Bible began, or at least how it was solidified in my life. I didn't "grow up" in Church. In fact, though I was raised to believe in "god" generally, I learned everything from Roman Catholicism to reincarnation/New Age spirituality to secularism.

I came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and surrendered my life to Him after the death of my 3-day old baby girl, who I gave birth to at the ripe old age of barely 15. Many twists and turns have occurred in my life since that day 41 years ago. Including being blessed with 5 more children, two step-daughters as well as the tragedy of a still-born son.

Somewhere in the midst of a very challenging trial...okay, a horrific 20 year difficulty ... I began questioning God, prayer and even the goodness of God. Why, if God was really listening (and His Word says He is) was life not getting any easier? Either He wasn't really listening or He didn't care or He wasn't even there, were just some of the thoughts swirling in my heart as I wrestled this out...

Had I, out of desperation, somehow convinced myself that the Bible and all this Christian stuff was true? Had I talked myself into a reality that existed only in my mind as an emotional crutch? Memories of New Age thinking flooded my mind, causing doubts to increase within me.

I had to know the Truth. Wherever that led me. I began a search that first of all included asking God to reveal Himself to me... and included reading the book, *The Case for Christ*, written by Lee Strobel, an award-winning investigative journalist for the Chicago Tribune who was an atheist and skeptic turned Christian. I devoured teachings by famed apologist from Australia, Ken Ham, and read the writings of C.S. Lewis, another skeptic turned Christian.

But in the end what convinced me of the Truth of God's Word was the stand taken by a hero of mine, Billy Graham. Dr. Graham faced his own moment of crisis fresh out of seminary. A friend and seminary peer by the name of Charles Templeton told Billy that he just couldn't believe the Bible anymore. That some parts were not trustworthy. This caused a crisis of faith for Graham that culminated in a mountain-top scene where Dr. Graham cried out to God for help. Finally, with an open Bible, he leaned upon a tree stump and made the declaration that though he didn't have all the answers, from that day on he would take his stand for the Inerrant Truth of the Bible.



Years later, Dr. Graham was famous for lifting high his Bible and proclaiming with authority, "The Bible says ..."

Back to my conviction of the Truth of the Bible. While secular historians from antiquity such as Josephus and Tacitus and modern Biblical scholars provided proof, in the end I made the choice to believe the Bible, the entire Bible, from the first word to the last, to be the infallible, inerrant Word of Almighty God. Period.

Now... **now** I have a foundation to lean into. To write about. To offer genuine comfort and encouragement to those facing real pain. Real adversity. Real tragedy. Heck...life happens to all of us doesn't it? I have nothing of real value or substance to offer anyone other than the Words of God Himself. Leaning hard into His Truth that can be trusted in. Depended on. His Word, no warm-thought positive phrase can provide authentic hope and peace. Not, and let me shout this from the mountain-tops of my laptop... not a feel-good, hope so, mind over matter, fluffy nonsense of "just think happy thoughts." Heck no.

*Stony Paths*

What I offer through my writing. Through my speaking, is the Truth. Truth that can be leaned into and relied upon.

Now, with that sure foundation ... let me encourage you dear one....

*The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him sincerely and in truth.*

Psalm 145:18 AMPC

He is near you. Near me. You are not alone. Seek Him and He will be found by you. Call upon Him. Sincerely. He will not fail you. Bank on it.



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Standing on the promises of Christ my King  
Through eternal ages let his praises ring  
Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing  
Standing on the promises of God

Russell Kelso Carter



# ANXIETY

*When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, Your comforts delight my soul ....*

*The LORD has been my Stronghold and my Refuge ....*

Psalm 94: 19 and 22 AMPC

I admit it, I'm a Trekki. Having watched and rewatched most Star Trek episodes many times over, it wasn't a surprise when a particular episode readily came to mind as I read, "multiplication of anxious thoughts" in Psalm 94. *The Trouble with Tribbles* episode is about these adorable furry creatures multiplying faster than rabbits! Quickly flooding the Enterprise ... but I digress. Now multiplication is good if we're talking about our bank account or vacation days or groceries or job promotions. It's not so good if we're talking about anxiety and anxious thoughts.

In our current global crisis known as the Covid-19 pandemic, anxious thoughts can easily and rapidly multiply within us. Literally flooding our heart and mind with **what if's** and **when will** and **why** questions. The illusion of control crumbling under our feet.

In Psalm 94, King David describes to us that his anxious thoughts seem to multiply. One anxious thought leads to the next and before long his mind is heading rapidly toward that panic-laden emotion of anxiety. As always, God's Word doesn't sugar-coat reality. Life happens – Job loss, relational troubles, a cancer diagnosis, incarceration, isolation, homelessness or even the inconsequential silliness of a bad hair day and anxious thoughts multiply. Like Tribbles. Throw in a pandemic and wow ... panic-laden anxious thoughts **flood** our mind.

## Stony Paths

So, what is the answer? It's the answer King David gave as he wrote this inspired text. We don't ignore the reality, we turn to our Stronghold and Shelter. Crying out to Him. Admitting how we feel. Warts and all. This isn't a time for religious, plastic prayers. (Is there ever?) We pour out our heart to Him. Sharing our panic and anxious thoughts - all the **what ifs** flooding our mind. Then we lean hard into Him and the Truth of His Word.

In real terms, it looks like opening your Bible to anywhere in the Psalms or reading Philippians 4, texting a friend or an online ministry for help or posting a prayer request or listening to Scripture on your Bible app, or turning on worship music.

The bottom line - turn to Him and His people, not away. And remember, true peace isn't because He removes our trials but because of His constant Presence with us **in** them.

If you look at the world you will be distressed. If you look within, you will be depressed. If you look at God, you will be at rest. - Corrie ten Boom

*Father, I lay all my **what ifs** and **why** and **when** questions at Your throne of grace and ask for You to infuse me with Your felt presence. Cause Your thoughts and Your peace to multiply within me! In Jesus' mighty name, Amen.*



# HE NOTICES YOU

*As He (Jesus) passed along He noticed a man blind from his birth.*

John 9:1 AMPC

Jesus *noticed a man*. A lonely beggar described as “blind from his birth,” is noticed by the Creator as He walked along the dusty roads of His world. I’m immediately struck by two points in this short verse of Scripture. First, that Jesus *noticed* the man in the first place. Didn’t He have important people to see and places to go? Didn’t the Savior have a Jerusalem daily planner to follow, demons to cast out or seas to calm?

I confess that I often race through the day without even looking up long enough to see the faces of those He’s placed in my path. Regular folks walking out their own version of blind-from-birth trials who just need to be “noticed.” So busy with *my* life and schedule that I neglect *His* schedule and His purposes for me.

Secondly, though this man is challenged by his blindness-from-birth condition and though he’s obviously close enough for Jesus to see him, the man remains silent as the Healer walks past him. Cue the chirping crickets. We read nothing of him calling out to Jesus for help. If I were in his shoes, I imagine I would be yelling, pleading, *begging* for Jesus’ attention, for even the *possibility* of healing. Yet he remains silent until Jesus Himself presses the issue.

Does the blind man’s silence speak loudly of one who couldn’t bear the possibility of another disappointment? Another emotional roller coaster of dashed-hopes? Or maybe he had grown so accustom and even comfortable *in* his pain that he no longer pursued healing? Had pain become so normal that he settled into it like an old chair? If so, the Lord Jesus put His finger on the “comfort zone” of this man’s painful normalcy and offered him deliverance.

Stony Paths

Our Lord takes the time to *notice us*. To even seek us out when we don't have the good sense to cry out. He comes to us in all our brokenness, pursuing us, loving us and then finally putting His finger on our own blind-from-birth condition as He initiates the longing for authentic healing and wholeness.

*You have taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in a bottle.*

Psalm 56:8 NASB

*My Lord and my God,*

*How thankful I am that You **notice** me, You see me and You care enough to stop. I can hardly type the words without astonishment flooding me. You even provide the desire for healing when I don't have the good sense to ask. Wiping away the fear of disappointment, I rest in Your faithfulness and lean into Your Sovereign arms. How I love and praise You Father!  
In Jesus Name. Amen.*



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God does not love the rest of the  
world more than He loves you.

Arterburg

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# FISH STORIES

*For they had not learned the lesson taught by the loaves, but their minds were dull.*

*"Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up?"*

Mark 6:52 Weymouth New Testament Matthew 16:9 NASB

For those unfamiliar with the loaves and fish miracle and what followed, allow me to offer a snapshot version of events: After a long day of ministry, the disciples faced the impossible task of feeding the hungry listeners – 5,000 men, not including their wives and kiddos, all in a time and place without Uber Eats or even a Kroger or McDonald's close by. In the midst of such insurmountable lack, one young man offered up his meager lunch of sardines and crackers to which the disciples said, "What's that little bit with such great need?" Jesus, on the other hand, accepted the gift, gave thanks and then gave instructions to the disciples – *and fed the 5,000*. With leftovers to boot.

Scripture says what happened next was **immediately** following this whole loaves and fish miracle. Jesus told the disciples to get in a boat and go to the other side of the lake, promising to meet them there. A life-threatening storm erupted and these seasoned fishermen turned Jesus' followers cried out in desperate fear. Jesus came to them walking on the water, but fearing He was a ghost, they screamed even more. In the midst of the storm and His followers anxious fear, Jesus commanded the wind and the waves to be still and the storm ended. The Bible records that the disciples were "utterly astonished", *because they had learned nothing from the loaves miracle*.

Stop there. Rewind. *They had learned nothing from the loaves miracle*.

## Stony Paths

All it takes is one crisis, one unexpected challenge to cause me to forget my own loaves and fishes' life lessons. Times He has delivered me *from* trials or walked me *through* trials ... times when I felt my world falling apart and yet He did the impossible or gave me strength, courage, comfort and wisdom to endure the impossible. How often, like the disciples, I forget His past miracles as I cry out in anxious fear or inwardly doubt His ability and concern as I struggle through my newest challenge. Can you relate? Have you forgotten your own version of the loaves' miracle?

This morning as I talked to the Lord about my own heart tendency to forget, I recounted back to Him just a bit of what He has done for me: The birth and days-later death of my oldest daughter which led me to surrender my life to Jesus Christ. The financial miracles when as a new Believer and teenage mom, I gave more than I could really spare and He *showered* me with blessings. The miracle of Him taking my teenage self of a hot-mess-in-dress and changing me into a woman of God. The defeat of a broken marriage that was turned into the over-the-top blessing of my gift-from-God husband. The miracle of watching many of our adult children endure great difficulty and then rise up as men and women of God, to be greatly in used in the lives of others. Astounding. My list is much longer but I'll stop there ...

I don't know what has caused you to forget your own stories, but allow me the honor of reminding you – He is no less God today than He was last week or last decade. Trust Him dear one, trust Him.

*Trust Him with your crisis, trust Him in your present circumstances, He sits as King over the flood and Meeter of every need.*

*Father, Please help me to remember in the midst of challenges – whether life altering or pebble in the shoe irritations - You are God. You are able. And You are faithful. I confess my trust in You. Help me to remember all my loaves and fishes lessons and share them with others! In Jesus mighty name. Amen.*

\*If you don't know Him personally, ask Him now to forgive you of your sin and receive Him as your Lord and Saviour. THAT is the awesomest loaves story ever! (I know that's not really a word but it fits!)



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There is no such thing as happenstance  
in the life of a child of God.

Unknown

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# DISTRACTIONS

*So that you may surely learn to sense what is vital, and approve and prize what is excellent and of real value [recognizing the highest and the best, and distinguishing the moral differences].*

Philippians 1:10 AMPC

The glistening fruit-flavored round candy on a stick was a perfect diversion to divert the little one from the impending needle. As mom held the lollipop, the child's gaze was momentarily distracted as the doctor gave the needed shot. Quickly over – tears and hugs mingled together as momma held close her little one, though painful for both, the momentary distraction had accomplished its purpose. Some distractions are innocent and even helpful, like the little one's lollipop/shot scenario. But not all distractions are as innocent – diverting us from what is vital and of real value.

The enemy holds up his version of a glistening lollipop to get us to focus on the frivolous or fleeting things of this life. **He may even use good things to keep us from focusing on the best thing.** Distracting us with our career instead of the family we're working for. Feeling compelled to offer all the trappings of "success" to our children instead of time with our children. Fretting over having a spotless home rather than enjoying the family/friends in the home. Religious activity instead of a personal, real-life relationship with Jesus Christ.

Other times the distractions are more sinister – drugs/drinking, pornography, self-pity, hatred, unforgiveness ... or as "innocent" as obsessing over the newest fashions or the newest phones.

He really doesn't care what it takes, as long as he can keep our focus off of eternal things, the "vital things", as God's Word says. And what is more vital than things of eternal value? Your soul, the souls of your children and grandchildren. The souls of men

and women you bump up against at work, the grocery store or across the globe?

The enemy's distractions are intended to hold our gaze as life goes fleeting by until we come to our last day, our last moment, our last breath ... and find we have been distracted to death ....

*It's sobering to contemplate how much time, effort, sacrifice, compromise, and attention we give to acquiring and increasing our supply of something that is totally insignificant in eternity.*

*-Anne Graham Lotz*

*Father, I don't even know where to begin...Please enable us to take an honest look at how we spend our life, our time, the moments that make up our days. Whether behind prison bars or at a desk, in a factory or at a pulpit, wherever we are in this life, help us to use our time for what has eternal value. In Jesus' mighty name, Amen*

# CHEESECAKE AND GOD'S WORD

*He sent His Word and healed them ...*

*The entrance of Your Word gives light ... making wise the simple*

*Faith comes by hearing & hearing by the Word of God ....*

*Psalm 107:20, Psalm 119:130, Romans 10:17*

I'm imagining a luscious, thick, rich wedge of New York style cheesecake. Not the light-as-air boxed version but the indulgent, weigh-15-pounds-and-then-gain-5 kind. No syrup or other goo, just the simple indulgence of one of my favorite desserts. I can continue picturing it, describing it and thinking about it, but if I don't eat a piece, I'm left with just the thought of what it might taste like. Only a superficial knowledge of my cheesecake...and that definitely won't do!

Our study of God's Word (the Bible) works in much the same way. We can read it, talk about it and even pray about it, but if we don't "eat" it by walking it out in our everyday life we have not really benefited from it. We've only experienced it from afar (like my cheesecake!). As when we eat, the food literally becomes a part of us, so too does God's word. He desires that we eat *and be changed*.

If our time in His Word doesn't change us there is a problem.

In my years of serving the Lord I have learned the need for, and the power of, God's inerrant Word spoken out of our mouth and acted upon. Listed below are some scriptures I regularly read aloud. I know God's Word will encourage you no matter the circumstance, His Word will not return void but will accomplish what He sent it to do. He longs for us to take Him at His word and then with His strength, be changed by it.



*Blessed is the man who stands up under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the victor's crown of life.*

*For what is seen is temporal but what is unseen is eternal.*

*Nothing shall separate me from the love of God in Christ.*

*(Not in your own strength) for it is God all the while at work in you (energizing, creating in you the power and the desire) both to will and to do His good pleasure.*

*He will keep you and sustain you in times of drought.*

*All things work together for good and are fitting into a plan for those who love God and are called according to His purpose.*

*Little children, you belong to God and have already defeated the evil one, because greater is He Who is in you than he who is in the world.*

*I will restore what the locusts have eaten.*

*We walk by faith and not by sight.*

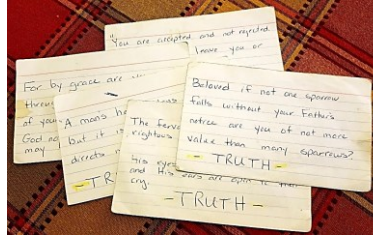
*For I know the thoughts I have toward you declares the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end (to give you hope in your final outcome). Then you will seek Me, inquire for, and require Me (as a vital necessity) and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you declares the Lord ....*

*My times are in Thy hands O God.*

*Thus saith the Lord ( Insert your name), be not afraid or dismayed by this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God's. You shall not need to fight in this battle, set yourself, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord...fear not, for the Lord will be with you.*

aths

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood (our fight is not merely with people) but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of this dark world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. [*principality = territory ruled by a prince*]



*Has He not spoken, and shall He not bring it to pass?*

*Be still and know that I am God.*

*Am I a God Who is near declares the Lord and not a God far off? Do I not fill heaven and Earth?*

Psalm 19:7, Isaiah 55:11, James 1:12, 2 Corinthians 4:18, Romans 8:39, Philippians 2:13 (AMP), Isaiah 58:10-12 (AMP), Romans 8:28 (AMP), 1 John 4:4 (AMP), Joel 2:25, 2 Corinthians 5:7, Jeremiah 29:11 (AMP), Jeremiah 29:13 (AMP), Psalm 31:15, 2 Chronicles 20:15 & 17, Ephesians 6:12 (AMP), Isaiah 46:11, Psalm 46:10, Jeremiah 23:23-24 Unless otherwise marked, scriptures are NASB

## FB MEMES OR TRUTH?

*He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide stable and fixed under the shadow of the Almighty whose power no foe can withstand.*

*I will say of the Lord He is my Refuge and my Fortress, my God; on Him I lean, rely and in Him I confidently trust. Psalm 91:1-2 AMP*

Pain is the great revealer, isn't it?

When life knocks us to our knees, when expectations are dashed, when grief overwhelms like a tidal wave or when we just plain hurt – it's then that we come to know what we *really* believe. Oh, we can share all the “Christian” memes or say all the positive-sounding Christianese phrases we want – but when the rubber meets the asphalt of real life, it lays us bare. Revealing where we place our trust and find our security.

*Have the heat of trials revealed your heart?*

Several years ago, while driving to work, I received a call from one of our grown children that sent me into emotional whiplash. After ending the call, I immediately poured out my heart to my Father, through tears telling Him I trusted Him in spite of what I was feeling and seeing. I knew He was in control and I would choose to trust Him. Although my heart still ached – I deliberately chose to stand on His Word and rest in His great faithfulness, goodness and sovereignty – wherever that led. He was worthy of my trust.

Other times, I haven't been quite so “spiritual.” I have felt sorry for myself. I have tried to control what only He can control (which is everything and everyone!). I have been paralyzed by fear. I have crumbled under the weight life's trials as I shouldered the pain rather than placing my burdens in His omnipotent hands. As I said, pain is the great revealer. And what

Stony Paths

it reveals isn't always pretty. Thank God for His grace and never giving up on us.

So dear one, has pain revealed *your* heart? Has it revealed where *your* trust lies?

No pain yet? Tuck this devo away for later or share it with another who is in need.

*Father God, Though the trials of life often feel like more than we can bear – as long as we lean on and trust in You, they are not. Enable us to rest in Your Sovereign control and the solid Rock of Your great goodness and faithfulness. We love You and drop to our knees in worshipful awe of You. Assured that You will work this trial out for our ultimate good and Your glory. In Jesus' mighty name, Amen*



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The kind of trust God wants us to have  
cannot be learned in comfort and ease.

Anne Graham Lotz

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## THIS I KNOW...

Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice, And be gracious to me and answer me. *When You said, "Seek My face,"* my heart said to You, "Your face, O Lord, I shall seek." Psalm 27:7-8 NASB

This I know, for God is for me. In God will I praise His word; in the Lord will I praise His word. Psalm 56:10 NCV

Beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God. Jude 20,21a NASB

*Has God trusted you with His silence— When you cannot hear God, you will find that He has trusted you in the most intimate way possible— with absolute silence, not a silence of despair, but one of pleasure, because He saw that you could withstand an even bigger revelation. - Oswald Chambers*

When the heavens appear silent or when the felt presence of my Lord Jesus seems to elude me, I am forced back to the simplicity of recalling what I know to be true. Dropping to my knees and grabbing my Bible, I open it to Psalms (anywhere will do!) and cry out ....

***This I know***, Father, Your Word declares that You will never leave or forsake me, that You beset me behind and before and have laid Your hand upon me. Your Truth trumps my feelings. I can trust You more than my fickle emotions or even the circumstances I see with my eyes. I know You, I know Your character...therefore I will trust and not be afraid. ***This I know*** You hear me, You see me and You will perfect that which concerns me. Thank You, Father God. Oh how I love You!

Though such prayer doesn't always change my feelings or even circumstances, I am able to stand tall in my spirit, knowing that His Word, *His Truth*, prevails. As I make the deliberate choice to

Stony Paths

Speak out, "This I know" I am encouraged in my inner man ... *and I know that I know ....*

Beloved, you can trust the One who died for you...

*Lord Jesus,*

*When doubt and confusion assail, grant me the ability to build myself up in the faith. Cause the simple truth of "This I know" to fall from my lips as I speak Your Truth over my spirit. Infuse me with power from on High! Thank You my Father! In Jesus' name. Amen*



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We are not necessarily doubting that  
God will do the best for us; we are  
wondering how painful the best will  
turn out to be.

C.S. Lewis

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# WHO HAS GOD SENT FOR YOU?

*And a certain man found him, and behold, he had lost his way and was wandering in the open country. (OT Joseph)*

Genesis 37:15a AMPC

Reaching for my crock-pot, but remembering it's on a shelf in the basement, I head to the stairs. *Do I have to tell you what happened next?* Yep ... by the time I reached the last step, I had no idea why I came downstairs! Wandering around, hoping something will jog my memory, I finally gave up and climbed the stairs. Of course, the moment I see the package of meat resting on the counter, I am reminded why I made the trip to the basement and off I go again! Though hilarious when it's only a crock-pot we're after, it's not so funny to get lost in life, wandering around trying to answer the questions, "What am I looking for, why am I here? I feel so lost."

Let's face it, sometimes we wander around the basement of life, wondering "why" or we simply veer off course and find ourselves lost, unable to GPS our way back to safety. Grief. Depression. Dashed expectations. Loss. Divorce. Betrayal. Death. Heartache. Pressures at work. Even "blessings" can knock us off course. And finding our way back isn't as easy as my crock-pot search.

But oh dear one, I want you to know, that just like the Old Testament Joseph where Scripture says "a man found him" as he was wandering. We serve a God who "sends someone to find us," as we're "wandering in the open country." You see, **He** knows where you are. You have not been forgotten by Him. *No matter how lost you feel, your Father God knows right where you are!*

If you've found yourself wandering through the challenges of life, trying desperately to understand the "why" or searching for hope that feels lost or simply overwhelmed by life - look around

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to see who He has “sent” on your behalf. Whether through His people, through His Word, or through circumstances, count on His provision. He is too faithful to neglect you, beloved. He gave the life of His Son for you, trust Him now through this season of wandering.

*The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,*

*and his ears are open to their cry for help. Psalm 34:15 CSB*

*Of Father, Your faithfulness reaches to the heavens! Face to the floor amazing that You send help my way before I even recognize I need it! Thank You for Your provision. How I love You! In Jesus name, Amen.*



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As you wait and walk...remember,  
your pain has purpose. Trust Him.

Becky White

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# A TOOTHLESS GRIN

*For we have all become like one who is unclean and all our righteousness (our best deeds of rightness and justice) is like filthy rags or a polluted garment. Isaiah 64:6a AMPC*

*They are all gone aside, they have all together become filthy;*

*there is none that does good or right, no, not one. Psalm 14:3 AMPC*

*But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8 ESV*

The second Tuesday of every month, my husband and I have the honor of serving at the Columbus Dream center, a ministry that serves the working poor as well as those living on the land. This Tuesday in April was no exception. As \*Amy walked toward me, the smell of urine mingled with no-shower-in-weeks met me before she did. Her nearly toothless grin beamed wide as her arms encircled me, excited to see me and show off photos of her recent baptism. We talked, laughed and hugged again.

I first met Amy, who often lived on the streets of the Short North, years earlier at Better Way Ministry (now Columbus Dream Center). She was a regular at the evening Bible study and dinner that followed. What a joy to see her so excited to share her news. *To share her news with me ...* I smiled and congratulated her on what the Lord was doing in her life.

But if I am honest, and I must be, that hug was uncomfortable for me. Her all-encompassing embrace caused me to stiffen even as I held her tight in celebration. As Amy walked away, I was secretly glad that I had “made it through” that exchange and even felt a bit too good about myself – *honesty, remember?* After the evening service, I stood talking with a woman asking for prayer, when I spotted Amy walking toward me. Continuing on with my

## Stony Paths

conversation, Amy waited anxiously a few feet away. Eventually, wanting dinner more than conversation, she walked away to get the free meal offered to all who attended the services.

Such scenes are common at Columbus Dream Center and are seldom easy for me. But this time it hit me like never before. This time the Lord put His finger squarely on my heart and spoke. Not for condemnation but for correction. His Words spoken through the OT prophet Isaiah overflowed my mind and heart. *“We are all unclean and our righteous deeds are like filthy rags and a polluted garment before Him.” Daughter, I looked past your filth to grasp your hand and pull you from the mire ...*” tears welled in my eyes.

*“Oh, Father, I see. Please forgive me. Apart from the Blood of Jesus, what You see when you look at us...when You look at **me**, is much like Amy’s physical appearance. The filth and stench caused by my attempts at righteousness apart from You, mingled with the pride of my own heart. And yet ... and yet You were willing not only to touch me, to embrace me, You were willing to become like me ... to save me.”*

Sincere regret filled my heart. I was reminded that “He who knew no sin became sin that I might become the righteousness of Christ.” I am not all that and a bag of chips ... but He is. (Becky’s translation). Utterly beautiful, is Amy’s love and excitement for the One who died so she might truly live. While I was repulsed by outward appearances, the Lord looked at her heart and was honored.

Dear one, your issue may not be an “Amy”, perhaps it’s something altogether different. Has pride blinded you to your own utter filthiness before a holy God even while you so easily notice the stains of others? Or maybe your filth is so obvious that you fear approaching the only One who is able cleanse you...We all stand equal at the foot of the Cross...sinners in need of The Saviour. Bow low and allow Him to lift you up.

*My Lord, thank You for looking past the stench of my life and pulling me from the filth of my sin. Enable me to see others with Your eyes and Your heart even as I speak the Truth in love to a lost world. In Jesus' name, Amen*

*\*Not her real name.*



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*The ground is level at the foot of the cross.*

Billy Graham

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## DEEP OR WIDE?

*Then a man of God came near and spoke to the king of Israel and said, "Thus says the LORD, 'Because the Arameans have said, "The LORD is a god of the mountains, but He is not a god of the valleys," therefore I will give all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the LORD."*

*Consider it wholly joyful, my brethren, whenever you are enveloped in or encounter trials of any sort or fall into various testings. Be assured and understand that the trial and proving of your faith bring out endurance and steadfastness and patience.*

*(It's) the little foxes that spoil the vineyards. 1 Kings 20:28 NASB James 1:2 AMPC Song of Solomon 2:15b*

You know when a deep trial has interrupted your life. No way of mistaking it. Waylaying you with a gut punch that often takes your literal breath away as it draws you to your knees in desperation. Though taking many forms, you know when you've been hit by one. Whether hours long or decades long, deep trials force our hand. Do we trust God or not? Is this Christianity thing real or feel-good nonsense? Both provide us the training ground opportunity to trust the Lord at a deeper level.

Deep is the kind of crisis I'm familiar with. The Lord has used many such trials to (attempt) to train me as a first response to lean hard into Him. To trust Him when I don't understand the why of it all. Through such discipline and training I have come to know first-hand of His great faithfulness. Even though and even when and even if ...

Wide, I'm not so good at. These catch me by surprise. One small layer of a trial here, another seemingly insignificant layer there and before you know it, all these pebble-in-my-shoe trials have caught me off guard. The enemy has set the trap with my own complacency and frog-in-the-pot wide trials of life. Rather than walking in His peace that passes understanding regardless

of my circumstances, I find myself anxiously on edge. And rather than crying out in desperation to my heavenly Father (after all, it's just a small trial) I try harder and harder to handle all those little stresses of everyday life. Is it just me?

Do you ever find yourself turning to God in deep trials or moments-of-crisis trials, while "forgetting" that He is needed just as much for the wide, everyday-life trials? "After all, it's not like I need to pray about \_\_\_\_, I can handle this little thing."

Today, as the Lord and I together, wade through the wide trials of everyday life, I am reminded that He is God of the mountains **and** the valleys. He sits as King over all trials - Deep or wide.

*There is no problem so big for which He is not adequate and none so small for which He is not needed. - Becky White*

*Father, Enable me to rest in You despite the layering of ordinary trials that fill my life little by little - often catching me by surprise ... Teach me to turn to You in deep or wide or long trials...casting all my cares and anxieties on You because You care for me. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

# FAITH IN HIM, NOT AN OUTCOME

*In quietness and confident trust is your strength.*

Isaiah 30:15 AMP

As is often the case, this devotional is ripped from the tear (and coffee) stained pages of my prayer journal. I invite you to walk with me through the messy and often painful process of learning to walk – step by blinded step – by faith. In Jesus Christ. Not faith in faith, not in a particular outcome, but faith in *The One* who is entirely faithful.

To begin, may I ask, have you ever had the “worst case scenario” occur in your life? Because, let’s be real, it does happen, doesn’t it? Expectations *are* dashed. The cancer diagnosis *does* come. Sometimes the child *doesn’t* return. The divorce papers *are* signed. The biological clock ticks *past* midnight. The pink slip *does* arrive. The dreaded 2am call *does* come. The casket *is* closed. What happens to our faith then? And no plastic, religious answers allowed.

As I have bumped up against some of these very scenarios, the raw reality is that my first reaction is often fear. Fear of what-if. Followed by frenzied calculations as I tell God (I mean pray) how He can fix the problem. Or wearying depression as I take in the reality that what I thought would be ... isn’t. Or what I hoped wouldn’t be, now is. I struggle along reading the Word and “praying” but my words feel as if they hit the ceiling and fall back to the ground, all the while the words of my Bible feel like promises for everyone-but-me promises. Is that too honest for you? I’m nothing if not transparent.

As the process unfolds into weeks and even months, my Father God patiently walks with me through the fog of pain or anger or fear until I can once again hear His sweet, familiar voice rising

from the pages of my Bible. Until, once again, I am flooded with a knowing that He has not been caught by surprise, even if I have. That He is aware and at work. And I am once again overwhelmed with a certainty that, *whatever the outcome*, He is good, He is faithful and I can trust Him.

Recently, as I wrestled out a challenging situation with my Lord, I penned the following words in my prayer journal.

*Father, I don't like to admit it, but I recognize that I am focusing on what I see instead of You and Your word. I have allowed the fear of "what if" to eclipse what I know about You, to eclipse what I know about Your character, to eclipse what I've seen You do in the past, to eclipse what I know to be the truth. You are good. You are faithful. You are at work. Whatever happens, You sit as King over the flood of my life and all that touches it. Please help me Lord, to focus on You and the truth of Your word, not what I see or think or feel. Not on my carefully measured calculations of what ought to happen. I admit that I find it so difficult to trust You in this particular area. Help me Lord! By Your grace, I make a deliberate choice to trust and rest in You. Whatever the outcome... You are good and You are faithful.*

I realize some of you *have* received the 2am phone call every parent dreads, some of you *have* been blindsided by health issues and others *have* had to front-face dashed expectations. I have no magic words (or wands) to make it all better. What I do have, I offer to you: The Lord Jesus Christ, His people and His Word. I have found no short-cuts to this reality. But I have found soul-deep comfort and a knowing that, *whatever the outcome*, He is good, He is faithful and I can trust Him. And so can you dear one, so can you. \*

As you wait and walk ... remember, your pain has purpose. Trust Him.

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*God's Word is truer than anything I see or think or feel.*

- Linda Dillow

**Bullet points for walking by faith**

We must trust that:

- He is.
- He is able.
- He is good.
- He is faithful.
- He will reward those who seek Him.

**Scripture references:**

Hebrews 11:1, 11:6, 11:11, 12:1-2

Romans 4:19-21 11:3

1 Thessalonians 5:24

Luke 18:19

Jeremiah 32:27



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God is in complete control. You are  
*where you are, when you are*, for His  
purposes.

Becky White

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## ON DISPLAY

*Jesus passed by and noticed a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was **so that the works of God might be displayed in him.** JOHN 9:1-4 NASB*

Several years ago, due to an illness, I found myself alone on Thanksgiving Day (unless you count the low hum of It's a Wonderful Life playing on the TV). While my husband and son were off serving meals at, Columbus Dream Center, to the less fortunate, I laid there teary-eyed and alone. Admittedly, self-pity reared its head momentarily as I lamented the fact that I was sick and alone on Thanksgiving Day. It wasn't long before the Lord reminded me of two friends walking through difficulty, and so, texting them and receiving specifics; I got to work lifting their needs to the Father. It was then I "heard" Him speak to my Spirit, "**This** is how I wanted you to serve Me today."

Have you found yourself "serving" by walking through the challenge of a long-term illness or the devastation of a divorce? Have you been granted the privilege of displaying His glory by choosing forgiveness over bitter resentment from some past abuse or by walking out the gut-level reality of adversity, in a way that honors the Lord God, rather than allowing self-pity or self-focus to engulf you?

*"...So that the works of God may be displayed in him".* In today's verse we see that a man was actually born blind in order that he might display the works and glory of God. Let me remind and encourage you today that although things may not have turned out the way you planned, He is in total control and is using you right where you are to serve and honor Him. Simply, stunningly, amazing! Trust Him dear one.

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*Lord God -- My Precious Father,  
Whatever it takes, in whatever form You choose, bring glory to  
Your name in, and through, my life. Thank You for the awesome  
privilege of being a display case for Your glory! Grant me eyes to  
view my life's circumstances through the lens of eternity. Have  
Your way, Father, have Your way.  
In Jesus' name Amen*



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Could it be that God has given you a  
platform of suffering from which you  
can be a witness of His power and grace  
to those who are watching?

Anne Graham Lotz

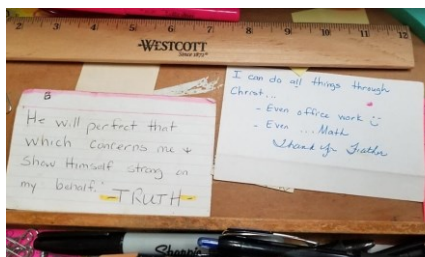
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# NO WEAPON

*But no weapon (missile) that is formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment you shall show to be wrong. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, their vindication is from Me says the Lord.*

Isaiah 54:17 AMPC



I just couldn't shake the feeling of heaviness. This nebulous feeling of "Failure, Loser, Stupid, Ugly" all swirling in the background of my thoughts for days. I felt as if I had a giant **L** on my forehead. While standing at my work computer, I opened my desk drawer so I could read a homemade, coffee-stained Scripture index card I had strategically placed months earlier. (You just never know when you'll need reminded of the Truth!)

Praying, I asked the Lord to help me and asked Him why I felt this way. I knew there was nothing in my circumstances that would explain such feelings.

Near instantaneously, I could hear in my heart the Scripture from Isaiah. "*No weapon formed against you shall prosper, but every tongue that rises against you in judgement, you shall show to be wrong.*" Then, as if the Holy Spirit washed my eyes with the Truth of His Word - I knew. The enemy had been forming, and then lobbing, weapon after weapon at me. All the while I was simply allowing them to pile up in a corner of my mind, rather than immediately recognizing them for what they were and then refuting them. *With Truth.*

Dear one, what weapon has the enemy formed *against you*? Is it pride, to keep you thinking that all this Jesus stuff is for weak

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people? Or maybe it's depression to keep you self-focused and miserable. Or anger that keeps you bitter and hard. Or fear that suffocates you with thoughts of "what-if?" Or rejection that causes you to strive for approval.

Or a victim mentality that causes you to blame others for your pain or circumstances or bad choices?

Like me, have you allowed those weapons to pile up in the corner of your mind rather than exposing them for what they really are? Lies. Let me encourage you to ask the Holy Spirit to sift your thoughts, expose the lies and then speak the Truth. Open His Word, ask the Lord Jesus to teach you how to apply it to your life in a real-world way. Like my coffee-stained, homemade Scripture index cards in a desk drawer ....

*"It's the Truth **you know**, that will set you free."*

- Steve Campbell

*Father, Please help me discern the enemy's tactics in my life. Enable me to quickly recognize the lies and then apply Truth, rather than allowing them to multiply in my mind. Thank You! In Jesus' mighty name, Amen.*

# WHAT DISTRACTS YOU?

*[I am distracted] at the noise of the enemy. Because of the oppression and threats of the wicked: for they would cast trouble upon me and persecute me.*

Psalm 55:3 AMPC

A number of years ago I worked for over a decade as a fast-food manager. One reason for my fast-food success is that I learned the art of “hurry up,” quickly becoming adept at doing *all things* with speed and multi-tasking in mind. Such a mentality served me well as a restaurant manager, but it doesn't do much for my walk with Christ. I can get so busy and in such a hurry... *so distracted* with the details of life that I forget the purpose of it all. The *why* I do what I do, gets lost in the rush to accomplish the next item on my to-do list.

Are you familiar with the New Testament story of sisters Mary and Martha? Let's just say Martha and I were separated at birth, and Mary would have gotten on my last nerve. One day Jesus came to their house for dinner and Martha kicked into over-drive preparing a Martha Stewart-esque meal. Mary decided she would rather sit down with a cup of hot tea and listen to Jesus teach while her sister Martha slaved away in the kitchen. (*Becky's Translation*) When she could stand it no longer, Martha asked Jesus if He cared that she was doing all the work. Even saying to Him, “Tell her to help me!”

Here, read it for yourself: *But Martha [overly occupied and too busy] was **distracted with much serving**; and she came up to Him and said, Lord, is it nothing to You that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me [to lend a hand and do her part along with me]!* Luke 10:40 AMPC. Jesus answered Martha by gently putting His finger on the real issue – a heart that was anxious and troubled about many things while neglecting the important things. *Like the Messiah sitting in your living room for goodness sake!*

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What distracts you, beloved, from your relationship with Jesus? Is it the pain you're walking through or the pain of a loved-one? The unfairness of a circumstance? Has anxiety or depression divided your attention? Maybe it's the ordinary duties of life or the drive to achieve that has distracted you from finding time to "sit at the Savior's feet" and listen. You see, the enemy of our soul doesn't care what it takes to distract us in our walk with Christ – just as long as he can *turn us* from an intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus, to other things. Even good things.

*Father,*

*How easy it is to get sidetracked by details of life or pain or even so called "success" and lose my focus. Would You help me Lord, to make time to sit and listen to You like Mary did, rather than complain about all that "I have to do" or walk through or deal with? Please take my Martha heart and use it for Your glory, Lord Jesus. I love You!*

*If fighting the battle requires your full attention, then if I were the enemy, I would distract you any way I could.*

*- Anne Graham Lotz*

# NO KING JAMES REQUIRED

*...when you pray, go into your [most] private room, and, closing the door, pray to your Father, Who is in secret; and your Father, Who sees in secret, will reward you in the open...*

*And when you pray, do not heap up phrases (multiply words, repeating the same ones over and over) ... for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.*

Matthew 6:6-8 (selected) AMPC

As my husband prepared for the privilege of teaching the folks at Columbus Dream Center, he read the selected Scriptures aloud at the dinner table. While he continued preparing his teaching, I was captured by a phrase of Scripture that kept reverberating in my spirit. *"Your Father, Who sees in secret."*

Walking outside to be alone, I flipped open my Bible and reread the passage again and again. How often I've hurried past that slice of Scripture so I could get to the "important" part commonly called *The Lord's Prayer*, without ever taking in the depth of each word the Holy Spirit chose to use.

Looking up from my Bible, I felt a pang of sorrow for my own lack of trusting faith ... knowing that my most recent prayers weren't offered with the deep conviction of – **He sees me**. That He's listening. Oh, sure, I can talk a good talk, but in the secret place where no one but my Lord can see, so often my prayers can be less-than-meaningful words of repetition, offered because it's what "I'm supposed to do."

Opening my mouth, I began to pray... not eloquently or King James-ish ... just talking with Him, acknowledging out loud that He sees me, He really sees me, and is aware of my heart. Aware of what burdens me or brings me joy, yet longing for me to share those joys and pains with Him, as an act of faith. Whatever His answer may be (and whatever timetable!), I am to walk in the Truth that *He sees me in secret*, He is aware of **me**. *Astounding*.

And **He sees, you**, dear one. When you pray, don't let this fact become lost in your words. *He sees you in secret* ... astounding.

*Oh Father, It is so comforting, when I stop and realize that You see me. You hear me when I call. You are aware of all I face, even as You long for me to articulate those joys and needs with You. Teach me to pray, Lord, with the full knowledge of Your presence. I love You so... In Jesus' name. Amen*



# WHEN LIFE UNRAVELS – THIS I KNOW

This I know, God is for me. In God will I praise His word; in the Lord will I praise His word. Psalm 56:9-10a NCV

If God be for us, who can be against us?  
Romans 8:31

Beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith... Jude 20,21a NASB



I have no magic words to offer. No religious piety to wipe away the tragedy of the tear-stained and heartbroken mama standing before me. Her 3-year old son will soon be gone. That reality thick in his hospital room, I reach down to touch his chubby little hand and ask if I can pray. *What*, I'm not sure, but I am compelled to bring this little guy and his hurting mama before the throne. She nods her head that it's okay as I take his hand in mine and pray....

I ask the Lord to comfort her heart, I invite Jesus into the center of the situation and speak the Blood of Christ over the little one. And then I tell Him what I am telling you ..."Father, I don't know what to pray right now or what to think. Such tragedy. I just confess that I trust You and that You are good and You are faithful. Please help."

There are times when we must simply take God's hand and walk THROUGH things. Not over or around, but through. I wish it weren't so but it is. And when we are confronted with tragedy or pain or dashed expectations, we must cling to the truth we know. "This I know, God is for me. It hurts so bad Father but I know You are in control. You are good and You are faithful. Help me, Lord to trust You through this. Not my emotions or the confusion swirling in my mind. But You."

One layer that made this particular hospital visit even more wrenching is that my own baby girl died in the same hospital – though decades earlier. The sights, the smells, the sounds and the heart-ache ... all came back to me in that moment. And along with the emotional ache of empty arms came the authentic comfort that I found those years ago when I surrendered my life to Jesus Christ, *as I held my own little one.*

Beloved, whatever tragedy has been allowed into your life, I am so sorry for your pain. Would you talk to Him now? Unburden your heart, tell Him your pain or anger. And then say with me, "This I know – God is for me. He is good, He is faithful and I can trust Him."

*Lord Jesus,*

*There are times when the pain is so great, if not my own, I see it in the lives of those around me. When I am tempted to trust my anxious thoughts rather than You, cause the simple truth of "This I know" to fall from my lips as I speak Your Truth over my spirit. Infuse me with power from on High. I love You Lord. In Jesus' name Amen*

***\* For Amber and her late son, Keatyn (and all the ladies at MRFW)***



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We must cling to the truth we know.

Becky White

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# ROCK BOTTOM

*If you seek Him [inquiring for and of Him, craving Him as your soul's first necessity], He will be found by you ...*

*When they in their trouble turned to the Lord, the God of Israel , and [in desperation earnestly] sought Him, He was found by them.*

2 chronicles 15:2,4 AMP

Rock bottom. Gutter level. The end of ourselves. I have been there more times than I want to admit ... sometimes because of others, and sometimes because of my own sin.

If you're anything like me, those are the places and times we most freely and *authentically* cry out to God in face-to-the-floor desperation. No flowery prayers. And blow my mind away – He has promised to meet us right there in our Rock-Bottom state. I stand in awe of our Lord's love-induced patience with us. Simply amazing.

In allowing us to come to the end of our own strength, our own wisdom and our own meager resources, the Lord Jesus offers us the *gift* of desperation. If we'll use it as means to acknowledge our weakness, He promises to make us strong, providing all we need to rise above the mire of our circumstances and granting us the ability to **be still and know He is God** in the midst of any difficulty.

Yet, so often we strut around oblivious to the fact that we are in a state of total dependence on our Father, foolishly behaving as if we know better than He. As If ...

Or we use these difficulties as a ready excuse for why we (fill in your own blank). Oh dear one, don't allow your pain or trial or rock-bottom situation to go to waste! Cry out to Him. He will be

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found by you ... and watch as He uses your trial for your good and His glory.

May He grant us the bitter-sweet gift of desperation and may it cause us to bend our will as well as the knee in awe-struck worship as we seek after our soul's first necessity – intimate relationship with our Father God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Whatever it takes to get you to the place where God is your all in all and you live in total dependence on Him is worth the pain.

- Kay Arthur

*My Father and my God,  
Though I would never have signed up for this time of desperation,  
I am so thankful for how it has brought me closer to You with  
a deeper recognition of my desperate need for You. I love You,  
Lord.  
In Jesus' name Amen*



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Every trial has a beginning *and an ending.*

Becky White

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# YOU NEVER WALK ALONE

*You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book. Psalm 56:8 NLT*

*For He hath known the way with me, He hath tried me -- as gold I go forth. Job 23:10 Young's Literal Translation*

*Remember how the Lord your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character. Deuteronomy 8:2a NLT*

Though not a constant, we all have some form of wilderness or fire to walk *through*. Flowing from one season to another or in waves of challenge, difficulties reach all of us.

Think back beloved. For a moment, allow your mind to retrace the wilderness years He's walked you through. If you're too young to reach back decades, peer over the last few months or years. Have you been humbled through a broken relationship, illness or financial difficulty? Has grief or loss tested you? Have you felt the refining fire of loneliness or emotional pain? Perhaps your testing has come in the form of blessing rather than difficulty as you struggle to depend on God rather than His gifts. Have you been called upon to be a burden-bearer for someone going through great pain and found it difficult to relinquish their need into the Lord's mighty hands?

Over a hot cup of coffee and an open Bible, let me share what brings courage to my soul and spirit as I walk through my own wildernesses. *"He has known the way with me."* My eyes are wet with tears as I type the words. I do not walk this path alone. *He has known the way with me.* I picture a Father walking a chubby toddler, her feet on his big shoes, his hands holding hers. As he steps, she steps. Her feet never touch the ground as her little toes

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ride atop his. Every step is taken in unison. And so it is with us, beloved. Though we can do nothing on our own, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

Our Father has known the way *with us*. **With you**. You are walking hand in hand with Jesus Christ.

*Oh my Father, You walk **with me**. I am never alone. Cause me to remember how You've faithfully walked me through decades of difficulty and will do no less today. Great is Your faithfulness Lord unto me. How I love You!*



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There is no such thing as a saint who has  
not suffered.

Paul E. Billheimer

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## HE'S GOT THIS

*For it is God who works in you both to will and to do His good pleasure.*

*(Jesus will) make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight.*

*But by the grace of God I am what I am.*

Philippians 2:13 NKJV, Hebrews 13:21a NKJV, 1 Corinthians 15:10a NKJV

Taking very seriously the privilege of teaching others from His Word, I diligently prepared several weeks in advance for an upcoming opportunity to speak at the Columbus Dream Center. When the day came, I spent my lunch break adding a few extra notes and scriptures to the lesson. Encouraged that I had found a great way to wrap up the lesson, I closed my notebook, confident that I had prepared as much as I could – knowing, He's got this.

Later that evening, after the worship leader played the last note of "Lord, prepare me to be a Sanctuary ..." I walked up to the podium. Having nearly memorized the first two-thirds of my message, I had not needed to step back and look at my notes that had been discreetly placed on the podium just before service. I prayed and then passionately spoke about the subject at hand. Nearing the end of the teaching, I stepped back to glance down at the newly written set of scriptures I'd penned at lunch time.

But as I stepped back to seamlessly pick up from where I had left off, to my horror, my notes were not on the podium! Gone. I stumbled a few moments, trying to recall the scriptures I'd

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written earlier in the day and then finally declaring out loud “My notes are gone! I guess I’ll have to wing it.” The congregation laughed as I composed myself and finished the lesson. Near the end, our worship leader walked up and sheepishly handed me my notes, which she had inadvertently picked up with her sheet music!

As much as I prepared and tried to do my best, in the end it was a good reminder not to take myself too seriously, and a clear reminder that it is Christ in me that gives me both the desire and ability to obey Him. You see, whatever He calls us to do, and wherever He calls us to do it – He will give us all we need to serve Him. Even a sense of humor or a humbling now and then.

I hope this story gives you a good laugh and renewed courage that if He calls you to something, He will enable you!



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*In order to realize the worth of the anchor  
we need to feel the stress of the storm.*

Corrie Ten Boom

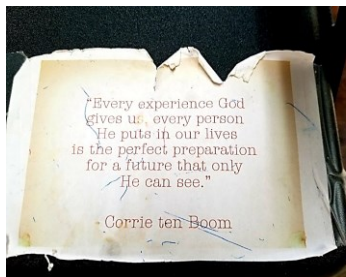
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## PREP WORK

*“Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers listened to him. Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled him up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. **Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt.**”*



*Many years later ... Joseph assured his brothers:*

*“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, the saving of many lives.”*

Genesis 37:26-28 50:20A NASB

*Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt.* If that phrase doesn't leap off the page at you, maybe you aren't familiar with Joseph's story. Or maybe like me, you tend to forget that our God often uses the detours and the pain and the tragedy of our lives to position us just *where* He wants us. Just *when* He wants us ....

Let's look at the cliff-note version of Joseph's story. He's dad's favorite son. Maybe a bit spoiled. Possibly a bit bratty. Definitely anointed by God. As a teenager, he's granted visions of his future that include power and greatness. That's the end of the story and *it will* come to pass because God said so. But hold on tight, with God's call always comes God's preparation. Of us. Of others. Of our circumstances.

For Joseph to walk out the reality of being second in command in the land of Egypt and being used by God as His instrument of

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“salvation” for thousands ... he experiences the pain of betrayal by his brothers. The degradation and hopelessness of being sold into slavery. The doing-the-right-thing yet cast-into-prison-anyway injustice of being falsely accused of rape and then incarcerated. *For years.* I’m sure this isn’t what Joseph had in mind when God gave him dreams of great blessing. But *preparation* for blessing is often painful and always necessary.

I have walked through “seasons of preparation” such as teen motherhood, the death of two of my children, divorce, betrayal and even my own addictions. These have produced in me a desperate dependence and deep love for my Father, along with genuine empathy for those in pain. Results that seasons of comfort and ease simply cannot provide. What about you dear one? Have your circumstances or difficulties blinded you to His sovereign hand? What are you walking through right now that may be a “season of preparation” for future blessing?

*“Every experience God gives us, every person he puts in our lives is the perfect preparation for the future that only He can see.” – Corrie ten Boom*

*Oh Father,  
Enable me to rest in Your sovereign control over my life. Please help me to focus on the truth of Your Word rather than being blinded or surprised by the circumstances around me. You love me, You have a good plan for my life and I can trust You... whatever the season. In Jesus’ name Amen*

# TIMING IS EVERYTHING

*When the fullness of time had come ... God sent His Son, born of a woman ... to purchase our freedom. To atone for, to ransom and to redeem us. That He might confer sonship upon us.*

*Now in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin whose name was Mary.*  
Galatians 4:4,7 AMPC & Luke 1:26 NASB

This morning I began rereading the almost overly familiar Christmas story beginning in the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of Luke. Sipping my coffee, I read the words “Now in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin whose name was Mary...” However, this time, the Holy Spirit caught my attention as the words leapt off the pages of my Bible. *In the sixth month the angel was sent from God.* I imagined the moment that the Father God said to Gabriel, “Today is the day. Now is the time. Go. Make the announcement.”

Immediately my mind ran to the scripture that declares, through the Apostle Paul, “In the fullness of time, God sent His Son.” Sending Him to purchase our freedom and deliver us from the chains of bondage. Because this adorable little baby in a manger became The Man, Christ Jesus, who suffered, died and rose again...all in the fullness of time ... for me. Astounding.

Now I must confess that I often allow this Truth to fade into the background of my mind as I linger on the at-the-moment-trials of life. Even feeling like He’s late or even dropped the ball in the face of my daily challenges. *Am I alone in this struggle?*

Has the ache of loneliness or pain of regret ... the fog of depression or hurt from dashed expectations ... or even the recipe-for-anxiety of daily life ...

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caused you to forget that God's timing is flawless ... *perfect*? That He sees. He hears. And is keenly aware of all you face? If so, let me remind you (and me!) that the same faithful God, who, "In the fullness of time" sent the angel Gabriel to Mary to announce His miraculous intervention into her life and ours, is the same God who will, "in the fullness of time," move in our lives as well.

With another sip of coffee, I flipped the pages of my Bible to Philippians 4 and read His word that reminds me to *be anxious for nothing but to pray about everything*. And then 1 Peter 5 reminding myself to *cast all my cares and anxieties onto Him because He cares for me* and that He will move at the precise moment needed. *Flawlessly*. In that truth I choose to trust.

*My Lord and Faithful God,  
As I lay my concerns in Your arms, I release the weight of them as well. Trusting that You will do the miraculous if needed. Whether that miracle entails changing me or my circumstances – You will faithfully move at just the right time, flawlessly. I love You! In Jesus' mighty name. Amen*



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“The times when you and I can't trace His hand of purpose, we must trace His heart of love.”

Anne Graham Lotz

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# GROCERY-BAG OLYMPICS

*Do not fret.*

*Cast your burden on the Lord [releasing the weight of it] and He will sustain you.*

*Casting the whole of your care [all your anxieties, all your worries, all your concerns once and for all] on Him for He cares about you affectionately and watchfully.*

*Do not fret or have any anxiety about anything, but in every circumstance and in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving continue to make your wants known to God and God's peace shall be yours...that peace which transcends all understanding shall garrison and mount guard over your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.*

*Psalm 37 (repeated in verses 1,7,8 ) Psalm 55 :22a AMP 1 Peter 5:7 AMP Philippians 4:6,7 AMP*

I'm the queen of grocery carrying-Olympics. Able to string on both arms, bags filled with half-gallons of milk, jars of spaghetti sauce and cans of veggies, while carrying a 12 pack of soda under one arm. The very real weight of the load nearly causes me to drop the soda, but I am a determined pro at this, so I struggle on. Of course, adding to that the ability to open the front door is another level of skill altogether! Once inside, I unstring the plastic bags that have, by now, made deep grooves in my arms and release the weight of my load. I can almost hear the crowd cheering!

What is a harmless challenge of grocery-carrying skill is no laughing matter when we attempt the same with our "bags" of life's inevitable difficulties. Attempting to string onto our arms the bags of depression, divorce, abuse, addiction, betrayal,

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disappointment, disease, loneliness, loss or grief. As the weight builds, we try harder and stuff under our arms self-determination. All the while, our heavenly Father stands waiting, arms open wide. Waiting for us to release the weight of our burdens into His hands. Though the burden may remain a reality in our life, the weight of it has been shifted into the hands of The Almighty One. As we release the weight through trusting prayer and acknowledging His faithfulness, He promises to protect our mind with His Peace that passes all understanding. He is good and He is faithful. Lean into that truth as you walk through this season of life.

I don't know what bag of difficulty you're carrying today, but He does. Would you release it into His hands dear one? Whether on your knees or while driving in your car or through writing in a prayer journal, tell Him your concerns, your worries or fears. Do it now, before you change your mind, and then bask in the faithfulness of your God who cheers you on.

*To added affliction, He addeth His mercies,  
to multiplied trials, multiplied Peace.*

– Annie Johnson Flint

*My Lord,*

*"Bags" in hand, I fall at Your feet and release the weight of these burdens. Cause Your Peace to wash over me as Your strength is infused within me. I need You Father. Thank You for Your great faithfulness, my Lord and my God. In Jesus' matchless name, Amen.*

# SHORT-TERM MEMORY LOSS

*... the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God. So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them.*

*The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The sons of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the LORD'S hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."*

Exodus 2:23-25, Exodus 16:2-3 NASB

As I take in the story of the ancient Israelites, I find I have much in common with them. In bare bones simplicity, the Israelites, steeped in physical and emotional bondage, cried out to God for deliverance. He heard and provided a deliverer - literally moving them from a land of slavery into a land flowing with milk and honey and freedom. *He has done the same for me.*

Yet in the midst of such a miraculous deliverance, God's people appear to have short-term memory loss concerning the hard labor, cruel task masters, the sting of the whip and the longing for deliverance. Instead, right there in the middle of God's miraculous provision, they begin to grumble and complain about menu choices, leadership styles and the real-life challenges freedom brings. *I have done the same.*

Memories of past cavernous-deep difficulties are blissfully fading as a God-given finally-able-to-exhale calm washes me. Freedom unimaginable. Joy unspeakable. Yet I find an unexpected test embedded within this gift of deliverance. Will I

too have short-term memory loss? Growing so accustomed to the freedom, peace and ease of “everyday” difficulties *that I forget?* Will I lose the sense of awe for all He has accomplished on my behalf?

It’s so easy to do, isn’t it? Whether our past “bondage” was due to an addiction or abuse, divorce or disease, depression or debt ... once free, we can so easily dishonor the One who provided our deliverance by grumbling and complaining in our land of freedom. Because ... let’s face it ... real life is ... well, *real*. And real life will have challenges and blessings and hardships and mountain-top and valley moments. Will time and that reality blur our view of His provision?

As I struggle with my own tendency to grumble rather than give thanks, I hear His Spirit saying to me, “Child, look around at what I have done, and continue to do, on your behalf. Don’t allow the miraculous to become ordinary in your land of freedom. Remember, to give thanks in all things.”

*My Father and my God,*

*Please forgive my ungrateful, complaining attitude. In times past, You gave me the ability to “give thanks” in the midst of such pain and “bondage”, enable me now to give thanks and continue to do so, in the midst of such blessing. Forgive me for taking Your good gifts for granted. I love You Lord Jesus. In Your name I pray, amen.*

“Gratitude is an offering precious in the sight of God, and it is one that the poorest of us can make and be not poorer but richer for having made it.” –A.W. Tozer



# WHY ME?

*"Beloved, do not be amazed and bewildered at the fiery ordeal which is taking place to test your quality, as though something strange [unusual and alien to you and your position] were befalling you. But in so far as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, rejoice."*

1 Peter 4:12,13a AMP

*"Why should the righteous suffer?" "Why not?" replied Lewis ... "They're the only ones who can handle it." -C.S. Lewis*

Why am I having such a hard day ...  
Why did I get a flat tire, *today* of all days ...  
Why are my children in rebellion ...  
Why is my child sick ...  
Why is my boss so unfair ...  
Why am I broke ...  
Why did I get fired ...  
Why can't we pay the mortgage ...  
Why was my spouse unfaithful ...  
Why? (fill in your own "why?")

Some trials are easily explained. We made a bad choice and have suffered the consequences of that decision, sometimes lasting consequences. Other times, there is no reason that can explain away the hurt, or offer any light concerning the "why" of our trial. There is no reasoning that will suffice. So we ask – Why me, Lord?

My question is this, Why not you? Why not me? The Word of God tells us Jesus learned obedience through the things He suffered, a servant is never greater than his Master. So I ask, why not you...why not me? Are we suggesting that others deserve to go through difficulties and we don't? Are we implying that because we've given our lives to Jesus Christ that we should walk on rose petals while others are left to suffer?

Suffering happens to all of us. No one is exempt. Though suffering itself is not good, what God can do in us and through us by means of suffering is remarkable. Light shines best in the darkness. If He has allowed some difficulty to arise in your life, trust that He has a plan and purpose for it all. In His hands, your pain will not be wasted.

It's okay to wrestle out the why of our trials with the Lord. He can take it. He'll love us no less. But as we do, let us be content that we may never know the answer of why until we meet Him face to face.

*Father,*

*I don't understand the "why" of it all – yet through tears and clinched teeth, I am willing to trust You. You know my pain, You are aware. Help me, Father. I offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving even in the midst of my present difficulty – You are worthy of my trust and worship. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



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Strength is born in the deep silence of  
long-suffering hearts; not amid joy. -

Felicia Hemans

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# BECAUSE YOU PRAYED TO ME

*Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "Because you have prayed to Me..."*

*The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.*

Isaiah 37:21a NASB James 5:16a NASB

In the middle of the crisis, it just didn't occur to me. Busily making decisions and finding solutions as I dealt with the reality in front of me, I forgot all about it. Only as the crisis subsided did it occur to me that I had completely forgotten ... *to pray*. Truly, I would like you to think I'm so saintly that it is always my first response, but it's not. Try as I might, there are times when I react rather than pray. Or I act *and then* ask God to bless my response.

While reading through the OT book of Isaiah I noticed a beautiful phrase that leapt off the page at me. "*Because you have prayed to Me*"... the LORD goes on to express what He will do for King Hezekiah simply *because he prayed*.

This praying king is confronted with a physical army coming against him on the outside along with taunts intended to strike paralyzing fear on the inside. The army's leaders deride the king for trusting in God, "After all", they tell him, "Have any other nations been saved by their so-call gods? What makes you think you'll be any different?"

*"Because you have prayed to Me"*... I picked up the phrase and held it to the light, taking in the depth of truth embedded within. Wondering out loud I asked, "Father, why does prayer move Your hand?" His Spirit spoke this simple idea to me; ***To pray is to trust***. To pray is to humble ourselves and acknowledge that we need Him. That He alone has the answers and that He is

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mighty and able to help us. Even if His answer is "no, or wait"... our trust in His goodness and great mercy stands tall on the truth that He will do what is for our best and His glory. In short, our prayer reveals trust in Him.

God went on to give King Hezekiah a tremendous victory that day. Through this praying king's real-life crisis, I am reminded that our God's mighty hand is moved through simple trusting prayer.

Dear one, whatever crisis you're facing - whether it's monumental in scope or a pebble-in-the-shoe irritation, pray. Right now, this moment, unburden your heart. Then rest in His great faithfulness.

It is not hard for the Lord to turn night into day.

-C.H. Spurgeon

*My Lord,*

*Please forgive my pride, I know that's the real issue of my heart. Go ahead, do whatever it takes to remind me of this truth - I need You. Period. For all things and in everything. Forgive my self-sufficient attitude. I lay \_\_\_\_\_ in Your hands, please move in that situation, Father. Thank You. In Jesus' name, Amen*

# WITHOUT AND WITHIN

*For even when we came to Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side; conflicts without, fears within. But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus.*

2 CORINTHIANS 7:5-6 NASB

*Afflicted on every side, **But God.*** As your eyes land on the phrase, allow your spirit to stop and drink in the comfort of those two words. **But God.** Keep reading, *But God who comforts the depressed ...* simply astounding isn't it? How tender. He comforts the depressed. He doesn't chastise or lecture – He wraps His arms around to comfort.

How did He do this for the apostle Paul? Read on with me...*comforted us by the coming of Titus.* Though He didn't remove the conflicts without and within, He oh-so-tenderly brought a friend to help! Doesn't the Creator and Sustainer of the universe have more important things to do? Maybe, but if you are worth the life of His Son, surely you are worth His time to comfort and encourage.

**Afflicted on every side. Conflicts without and fears within.** Isn't that an accurate description of life sometimes? Whether it's the affliction of loneliness or illness ... the conflict of war or personal relationships in chaos, whether it's fear of failure and fear of rejection or the dreaded fear of "what if?" – The battle rages without and within for all of us in one form or another.

Allow me the privilege of being a Titus to you today. Your Father is aware of the conflicts assailing you, whether they are on the outside for all to see, or hidden away in your heart ... He is aware. Allow that truth to comfort you this day.

Or maybe, just maybe, this devotion finds you in a position to be a Titus to another...if so, please reach out to that one person

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coming to mind right now. Your Father is calling you to be His arm of comfort today. What a privilege He is granting you!

*Father,*

*Thank You ... thank You for Your soul-deep comfort. Though words can't adequately articulate my conflicts and fears – You see, You are aware. And You comfort ... oh how You comfort! You are my strength and High tower; in You I trust and rely. I love You precious Lord!*

*In Jesus name I pray,*

*Amen*



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He comforts the depressed. He doesn't  
chastise or lecture – He wraps His  
arms around to comfort.

Becky White

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# HIS LITTLE ONE

*Be still and know He is God*

*Cease striving and know He is God.*

Psalm 46:10 x2

Busy. Always busy. In fact, my idea of wasting time is to work on only one project at a time. Perish the thought of sitting down to write a blog entry without a load of laundry in the dryer or reading a news article without something baking in the oven. Thus, my habit of hand-washing dishes while listening to an audio book or a podcast sermon while at work. A great way to “stack” my time.

But busy isn't always best. In fact, busy can get in the way of *best*. God's best. God's voice. God in our everyday life. You see, if not careful, I carry this attitude into my relationship with Jesus. And I end up missing His voice from my habit of time-stacking tasks. Flipping the pages of my Bible during my “quiet time” from Isaiah to Daniel to Psalms to 1 Peter - I have my “usual” go-to spots - frantically asking, “Where are You God? I don't ‘feel’ You. I can't hear You, what are You speaking to me?”

Cue the crickets. Nothing. Drowning His voice out with my spiritual busyness that morphs into spiritual panic. “I can't find, You, Father.” Becomes my heart cry.

Recently, while washing dishes and listening to a podcast sermon, I heard something that caused me to stop. Rinsing my hands, I reached to turn the faucet off and with a still soapy finger I touched the screen on my phone to replay the last 30 seconds. In your busyness, “*Why don't you stop searching and striving for God? Why don't you sit still and let Him find you - again?*” She went on... “*Recall the day and moment that He found you those years ago. Relax and rest. He is still seeking you.*”

My heart melted into a pool of liquid peace with the thought that I could simply stop, sit still, and let Him find *me*. Again. I recalled all over again, the moment He found me those years ago in a hospital room after my baby girl took her last breath. When searing heart-pain engulfed my entire being, when I could do nothing to help myself. He found me. He found me as I sat alone, cradling my little one. Through the tragedy of her death, I was found by Jesus Christ and became a born-again child of God. His little one.

Flashing forward to the present moment of dishes and work and a wonderful husband and grown children and grandkids and the inevitable challenges of real life ... and remembering with a fresh awareness that I'm still the helpless one. And He still seeks me.

Allow Him to find *you*, beloved. You are His little one, He loves you so.

*God has no favorites. If He'll show Himself strong on behalf of  
Joseph or Job, He'll do the same for you  
- Becky White*

*My Father and Lord*

*What a tender reminder of how much You love us, Your "little ones." Would You help me find the right balance, Lord? I choose to seek You even as I rest assured that You are seeking me! What authentic comfort that truth brings to my soul. I love You Father. In Jesus' name, Amen*

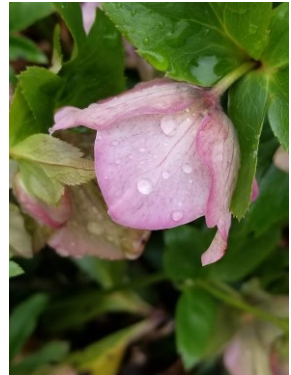


# TRUST HIM IN THE RAIN

*Sorrow may last for the night but joy comes in the morning. Psalm 30:5  
For You have been a Stronghold...and a Shelter from the storm.*

*When you pass through the waters (of difficulty) I will be with you.*

*Isaiah 25:4a Isaiah 43:2a AMP*



I wish it wasn't so. But it is. Storms of life are inevitable. While the depth and breadth and severity may differ from one person to another, we can all count on them showing up at our door. That's just real life, isn't it?

Beloved, I promise not to slap a plastic "Praise the Lord" bumper sticker phrase across the pain of your heart, even as I gently prod you to step back, exhale a moment and seek to discover His hand, His very presence with you *in your storm*.

I have found, and maybe you have too, that while God has seldom prevented storms from whipping up all around me - sometimes with waves crashing so hard that I literally gasped for breath - He has never failed to shelter me in the Storm.

With the umbrella of His Presence.

With the umbrella of His Peace.

With the umbrella of His Comfort.

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And with the strong umbrella of His Sovereign control over *all* that grazes my life. (Romans 8:28 and Genesis 50:20)

Whatever our storm – Divorce or Death. Addiction or Abuse. Discouragement or Disease. Hopelessness or Hostility. Fear or Failure. Uncertainty or What if's... Our God is mighty and able to shelter us while these storms pass by. (Psalm 57:1) There will come a day when the rain stops...Every trial has a beginning and an ending.

Oh, dear one, will you take His hand as He not only shelters from the storm, *but walks you through it?*

Sheltering in Him may look like, opening our Bible to Psalm 46, (cup of coffee nearby, of course) and reading His word out loud.

It is talking to Him, wrestling through our fears and pain and what if's. It is prayer that eludes words...simply “being” with Him... It is listening to worship music, and being intentional about what we allow our minds to dwell on. It is calling/texting a friend who loves Jesus and being authentic about what we're walking through.

There will come a day when the rain stops...Until then, (*and even then*) rest in the shelter of the Most High.

*Lean hard on Me my child, and I will be your peace.*

Francis J. Roberts

*Father, sometimes the wind and waves of this storm cause me to feel overwhelmed, angry or fearful. Forgive me. I release myself and my difficulties into Your hands. Please envelop me in Your*

*peace and renewed hope. Grant me Your perspective in this storm.  
I choose to trust You. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



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“I am not a theologian or a scholar, but I am very aware of the fact that pain is necessary to all of us. In my own life, I think I can honestly say that out of the deepest pain has come the strongest conviction of the presence of God and the love of God.”

Elisabeth Elliot

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## BY THE HAND

*I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt ...*

*I will bring you up out of the suffering and oppression of Egypt ...  
to a land flowing with milk and honey.”*

Hebrews 8:9b AMPC Exodus 3:17 AMP

I love to walk hand in hand with my husband, whether we're power-walking trails at a nearby park or strolling through grocery store aisles. There's something tender, personal and even "safe" about such a simple gesture. It also necessarily means that we are going away from, and then to, the same location, together.

In today's Scripture reading we hear our Lord say this about His people, "I led them by the hand ..." God, the Creator, Sustainer and Lord of all ... "led them by the hand"! If that weren't enough to blow our minds into face-to-the-floor worship, He goes on to say where He led them from, "Out of Egypt. I'll keep this simple. Egypt is B-A-D, full of emotional, physical and relational pain.

Though the ancient Israelites were in, and then led out of, a literal land of Egypt, you and I encounter our own versions of "Egypt", don't we? The emotional ripping and tearing of abuse or addiction. The relational pain of pornography or divorce. The physical challenges of our own illnesses or the searing pain of helplessly watching those we love, suffer.

Beloved, His same promise is true for you and I.

*I will lead them. By the hand. Out of Egypt.*

Our Sovereign God hasn't promise to whisk us away in a fairytale'esque escape plan. No. He has promised to lead us out. Lead us step by challenging step. Lead us out miracle by miracle if

needed. Providing the manna of His Presence along the journey as He leads us out, into a land flowing with the milk and honey of joy in the midst of trials, peace in spite of pain, and authentic compassion and empathy. Bestowing on us a testimony that shouts His great faithfulness, that has led us by the hand out of the Egypts of our lives and into the promise land of fulfilling His purposes in us and for us.

*My Lord,*

*Such tenderness and compassion You show through the promise to lead Your people (which includes me!!) by the hand... out of my Egypt and into the promise land where I will testify of Your great faithfulness to restore and deliver. I love You beyond words. In Jesus' name, Amen*



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God is God. Because He is God, He is worthy of my trust and obedience. I will find rest nowhere but in His holy will, a will that is unspeakably beyond my largest notions of what He is up to.

Elisabeth Elliot

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## FISH-BELLY PRAYING

*Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly... I cried out of my distress to the Lord, and He heard me; Jonah 2:1-2a AMPC*

*In my distress I called upon the Lord, And cried to my God for help; He heard my voice out of His temple, And my cry for help before Him came into His ears.*

Psalm 18:6 NASB

Sometimes we are thrown over-board by our own sin and rebellion, other times, life throws us into the depths of the sea by virtue of simply living life. No matter how we arrive in our “fish-belly” state, I want you to see that God cares. He is attentive to our cries for help, and even sets the table to make it “easy” to do so.

Jonah became fish-food because he decided he didn’t want to obey God’s clear direction. God allowed that choice, but in His great love for Jonah (and all future Jonah’s), God narrowed the options. Closed some doors. Made it “easy” for Jonah to bend the knee, recognize his sin and cry out for help.

King David found himself in a fish-belly situation, not because of his own sin, but because of another’s. God made use of someone else’s rebellion, creating an unfair circumstance in David’s life to narrow his focus, to close doors and narrow options. God, through the pain of an injustice, made it “easy” for David (and all future David’s) to acknowledge his own brokenness and ask for help.

I’m as guilty as Jonah, David or anyone else in my need for God to narrow my focus, remove options and close doors to make it “easy” for me to cry out to Him. I find it all too easy to go it alone until a crisis forces my hand and I am, once again, praying in the belly of the fish.

Beloved, regardless of how you came to be thrown overboard, get on your knees and start praying your own version of fish-belly prayers, He hears you and will move on your behalf!

*Oh Father,*

*Help me recognize how very much I need you, ALL the time. Not just when a crisis arises but in my day-to-day life. As I drive to work or wash dishes or talk with a neighbor. All of life, in every area, I need You. Desperately. Forgive me for the times I've lived as if I don't. In the mighty name of Jesus, Your one and only Son, I pray. Amen*

Anything is a blessing which makes us pray.

-C.H. Spurgeon



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There is no problem so small that God is not needed  
and no problem so big for which He is not adequate.

Becky L. White

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## BID ME COME

*Peter said to Him (Jesus), "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."*

*And He (Jesus) said, "Come!"*

*And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus.*

Matthew 24: 28-29 NASB

*Bid me come.* Hearing the words spoken out loud caused me to pause. Having spent most of my early days as a follower of Jesus, saturated in the often poetic KJV wording of the Bible, I immediately recognized the antiquated phrase. It spoke of Peter asking Jesus, "Hey, if that's really You walking on the water and not some ghostly aberration, call me out onto the water to join You." But this time I really *heard* it. And because of a particular challenge in front of me, I found myself asking ...

If it is You, Lord, bid me come... to step out of the boat of my comfort zone and 'walk on the water' of the tasks before me. Bid me come to You Jesus, as I grasp Your hand and do the impossible. As I survey the 'water' of opportunities that stretch me beyond myself and the 'sea' of "Are you kidding me?" challenges. If it's really You, enable me to walk on the water. As I say with Peter, "If it is You Lord, bid me come... And if I sink (or when!) I know You will, with great mercy, extend Your hand and rescue me."

Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing, but through Him, we can do all things. And as a dear sister reminded me recently, because it's *all* Jesus, we should at once be humbled and yet filled with great courage.



What about you, beloved? Is there an impossible task, a broken relationship, a dead-end job, a heart-pain or an addiction that appears as a crashing wave of impossibilities before you? Ask Him, "If it is You Lord, bid me come ..." and then step out of the boat and onto the water! He will enable you to do the impossible.

*My Lord and my God,*

*With You, there is no such thing as 'impossible.' As You gave Peter the literal ability to walk on water ... grant me the ability to walk on the water of the challenges before me. Without You I sink, with You, I can do all things! Because of this truth, I am at once humbled and yet filled with renewed courage! In Jesus' name I pray. Amen*

*Then Moses said, "If you don't personally go with us, don't make us leave this place.*

*Exodus 33:15 NLT*



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It is doubtful that God can use a man greatly  
until he has been hurt deeply.

A.W. Tozer

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## WHAT'S YOUR RED SEA?

*To Him who divided the Red Sea into parts, And made Israel pass through the midst of it,  
But tossed Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea ... to Him who led His people through the wilderness ... His lovingkindness endures forever.*

PSALM 136 selected verses AMP

*"Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is there anything too difficult for Me?"*

JEREMIAH 32:27 AMP

Do you have a "Red Sea" in front of you and a "crazed army" behind you? Have your circumstances backed you into a corner of impossibility? Has the hopelessness of what you see caused you to crumble in a heap?

In my life I have been privileged to see God move in mighty ways, accomplishing the downright miraculous, yet I find in the midst of new challenges, I can lose sight of His past miracles and crumble. To my sorrow I have much in common with the ancient Israelites who witnessed Almighty God part the Red Sea yet could not trust Him to adequately feed them, or Jesus' disciples who were privileged to be an audience as He raised the dead but could not trust Him to protect them in a thunderstorm. *Woe is me!* I am undone by my own lack of an authentic and deep trust that would consistently sustain rather than peak and fall with circumstances.

How about you, beloved? Have you witnessed His sovereign and miraculous hand of grace and power during a past crisis yet lack faith for your present challenge? May I encourage you that the same God who met you on the mountain-top will meet you in the valley, the same God who made a way through your desert experience will make a way through your present wilderness. He

changes not. He will act. He is all-powerful and utterly faithful. Trust, dear one, trust!

Every difficulty – is God's opportunity.

*My Lord, enable me to walk in consistent trust - help my unbelief!  
Your sovereign power mingled with Your great love are the pillows  
I choose to rest on. You will either remove my difficulties or  
provide all I need walk through them. ...grant me a crisis-proof,  
unshakable trust in You, Your character and Your ways! Thank  
You in advance, Father!  
In the matchless name of Jesus I pray, Amen*



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See then I have placed you in the very school  
where the lesson is taught; your surrounding  
and companions are only working out my will.

Paul E. Billheimer

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# IRON GATE OF DIFFICULTY

*And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands.*

*When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself.*  
Acts 12:7, 10 NASB

King Herod had James, the brother of John, executed for proclaiming the Name of Jesus, and then seeing how popular that made him with the locals, he decided to arrest and execute Peter as well. Once seized, Peter was guarded by four squads of four soldiers each, Herod didn't want to take any chances on this guy getting away! According to Scripture, "the very night" Herod was to have him executed, Peter lay in a guarded cell, between two soldiers, fastened with chains. All this behind an iron gate. I can't imagine a more there's-no-way-out-of-this scenario in my life. If the 16 soldiers weren't enough, the chains and iron gate would have sealed the deal. "This is without hope." *And that's right where the enemy wants us. Wants you. Without hope.*

I want you to think about Peter's real-life situation for a moment. How utterly impossible it seemed – and compare it to your own *iron-gate circumstance*. Do you have one? A relationship issue, a family problem, a job challenge or a financial melt-down? Depression. Heartache. Divorce. Death. Illness. Betrayal. Loneliness. Let's face it. Life can be tough. Impossible situations occur. But, O beloved, we are never without hope. Never. Trust Him.

Iron gates of difficulty. Impossible situations. Without hope circumstances. These, dear one, can be God's opportunity to show Himself strong on your behalf. Our Father God will open the iron gate and either free you from the circumstance or

provide all you need in the midst of the circumstance. I don't know what you're facing at this very moment, *this very night* ... but rest assured, beloved, God sees. He is aware. He has no favorites. Cry out to Him. He is the Lord, the God of all flesh, is there anything too difficult for Him?

*Father,*

*When I look at the "iron gate" in front of me, I gasp at the impossible-ness of it all. But this I know, You love me, and You are more than able to open this gate of difficulty on my behalf. I trust You, Lord Jesus to accomplish Your good pleasure in my life. Bring glory to Your name through my iron gate circumstance. I love You! In Jesus' name, Amen*

*We do not fully grasp the nearness of our God. - Becky White*



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There is no ideal place to serve God –  
except where He's put you.

Charles Swindoll

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## GOD'S SILENCE?

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?*

*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all,*

*how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?*

ROMANS 8:31-32 NASB

Sometimes God is silent. Or at least it feels that way.

Sometimes He seems galaxies away. Or at least it feels that way.

Sometimes I think He's forgotten all about me. Or at least it feels that way.

Sometimes it appears that He doesn't really care about my pain. Or at least it feels that way.

Sometimes I think my mistakes, or outright sin, have disqualified me from His help. Or at least it feels that way.

*Have you ever been there?*

My husband and I are reading through the Bible for the New Year, in the process, we came across the OT story of Hagar. Though we finished our study and put our Bibles away, I just couldn't shake what this woman endured and how our LORD met her very intimate need for hope in the midst of hopelessness. For assurance that she wasn't alone in the aloneness of her circumstances. Details aside (I encourage you to read her story, Genesis 16-21). God showed up when she was at her lowest.

How does this oppressed servant girl, who appears on the "wrong" side of the story, rate a personal visit from God? A personal word of encouragement? It's not so much **who** she was, but who she represents. The lost. The forgotten. I believe the

answer lies in the name Hagar uses to describe this face-to-the-floor visit from the Almighty. El Roi, The God Who sees. She can't get over the mind-blowing truth, "He sees me! *Me?! He. Sees. Me.*

*And He sees you, Beloved.* Whatever the trial. Whatever the difficulty. Whatever the issue. Whatever the cause. El Roi sees you, He is aware. And as our above Scripture assures, if He has given the life of His Son for you, is there anything He won't do for you? Bask in that truth, Beloved.

*Father, Oh Father,  
Help me wrap my mind around this truth! You see. You are aware.  
You are at work. I need \_\_\_\_\_. Please help me, Lord! You are  
the God who sees, even in the recesses of my heart, You see. In the  
mighty name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.*

"In darkness God's truth shines most clear." - Corrie ten Boom



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In You, O Lord, I put my trust and seek refuge.

Psalm 31:1a AMPC

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# SHATTERED SNOW- GLOBE

*The LORD is near to those who are discouraged;  
he saves those who have lost all hope. PSALM  
34:18 GNT*

*The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and  
saves the crushed in spirit. PSALM 34:18 ESV*

*You are near, O Lord [nearer to me than my foes] PSALM 119:51A  
AMPC*

*Trust in Him at all times, you people; Pour out your hearts before  
Him; God is a refuge for us.*

*PSALM 62: 8 NASB*

Wiping away coffee stains and donut crumbs from the outdoor serving tables as she mingled with the guests, it was just another day of urban ministry. A team of volunteers had prepared scrambled eggs, biscuits and sausage, for those without a brick-and-mortar address and some who were just in need of a meal and a caring face – all sprinkled with conversation, prayer and a hug or two.

But on this day ... the woman served a guest that she never expected to cross her path in this setting... mingled among the diners who carried all they owned in a knapsack was... Her grown daughter.

Her heart broke at the sight of her “child.” Engulfing her in a momma bear embrace, she listened as her daughter shared details of the past few months. Her momma’s heart ached at the





painful scene confronting her. Yet thankful for the foundational knowledge that her daughter was still alive. For another day.

After the meal, she watched as her daughter rolled away and toward the busy city street in the worn-from-use wheel chair, her heart aching at the scene before her. Though the need for a wheelchair was relatively recent, her daughter's hands now expertly moved the side wheels while her exposed left foot pushed the chair along the concrete sidewalk. The scene pierced the momma's heart as her eyes were captured by the sight of the bare, calloused and dirt-stained foot, pushing methodically along. Instantly, she was transported back in time. Hot tears welling as she envisioned her daughter's tiny, sweet smelling, baby-girl feet with pink satin booties and a delicate ribbon carefully tied in a bow. So perfect. So beautiful.

Lowering her gaze, the momma turned away in emotional ache as the rawness of the scene washed over her... her daughter ... her "baby girl" ... now nearing 40, missing a leg, addicted and "contentedly" homeless.

This true story reminds us that being a follower of Jesus Christ doesn't exempt us from pain. The momma ached; the daughter struggled with addiction. For some, your reality is the death of a child. For others, depression or despair are threatening to engulf you as one who has "lost all hope." We do not live the Christian life in a snow-globe – always beautiful and delicately protected from adversity. Though no one has been given an exemption-card from the trials of life, He has promised us His very presence as we walk through them ... even as He asks us to trust Him with what we do not understand.

## Stony Paths

Trace again the words of scripture. Put your finger on each word and speak them out loud. “The LORD is near to those who are discouraged; he saves those who have lost all hope. He is near the brokenhearted.” While I have no magic words to wipe away your pain, allow me to lead you to the One Scripture calls “a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”. (Isaiah 53:3) Lean into Him as you walk through your own version of a shattered snow-globe situation. He is nearer than all you face.

*Father, Your word says that You are the God of all comfort and a Refuge for us. While I admit I would much prefer an exemption-card from difficulty, I realize it's through trials that I learn to trust You, and Your grace, to carry me. I love You, In Jesus' name, Amen.*



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If God sends us on stony paths, He  
provides strong shoes.

Corrie ten Boom

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# IN THE DAY OF FAMINE

*They will not be ashamed in the time of evil; And in the days of famine they will have abundance.*

PSALM 37:19 NASB

Starving children, swelled bellies, ragged clothes, and as if to add insult to injury – swarming flies. For many of us, that’s the imagery evoked by the word *famine*. Yet, most will never experience firsthand what that’s like. So how do these Scriptures about famine apply to *our* lives?

*Lack*. That’s really what a famine is. Lack of the most basic of necessities of life. Have you ever walked through a season of lack?

Lack of hope ...

Lack of peace ...

Lack of a home ...

Lack of wisdom ...

Lack of strength ...

Lack of emotional support ...

Lack of material possessions ...

Our Father has promised, has bound Himself to His Word, to abundantly provide for His people *in the day of famine*. In the midst of famine He will arise as our Provider, not necessarily stopping the famine but supplying our needs in the midst of it. As the omnipotent God He is, He could lift us by the scruff of our neck from the famine of our circumstances and place us in a garden of ease, but that would not demonstrate His might power like providing for us in the middle of the famine. What honor we are given to be used as reflections of His glory!

*O my Father!*

*Though lack swarms around me as real as the flies of a physical famine, You have, and will continue to, abundantly provide for me in the midst of. What a privilege it is to testify of Your faithfulness*

Stony Paths

*on my behalf! As always, You cause Your Word to be real in my life, not simply theology but rubber-meets-the-road-reality. I adore You. In the mighty name of my Lord Jesus, Amen*



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I trust in You, O Lord, I say You are my  
God, my times are in Your hands.

Psalm 31: 14-15a

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# BEAUTY FOR ASHES

*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me ... to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives ... to comfort all who mourn ... giving them beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of heaviness and fainting. So you will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified ... Instead of your shame you will have a double portion, and instead of humiliation you will shout for joy over your portion. Therefore you will possess a double portion ....*

Isaiah 61 (selected verses)

What has, or is, causing you shame? What has been allowed into your life, either by your own choice or thrust upon through another's that has brought you heaviness and even caused you to feel faint from the weight of it? What circumstance has left you brokenhearted and in mourning? O dear one, I am so sorry for your pain.

The Lord God, the omnipotent One wants you to drop the cloak of heaviness and replace it with a mantle of praise. He longs to cast from you the spirit of fainting and provide you with a beautiful garland instead. Rather than your shame He desires to grant you a double portion. Where you have walked in humiliation and emotional aching, you will shout with joy over the portion He has given you. You shall possess a double blessing. Beloved, receive this truth today. *He is for you, not against you.*

Resist the heaviness and arise with praise to your God for granting you either deliverance from your present trial or the grace and strength to walk on another day. Your day of deliverance is as sure as the setting sun!

Our pain must pass the "purpose" test.

Stony Paths

*Lord Jesus,*

*I hand You my shame, my pain and my heartache ... envelope me in Your peace and remove from me the garment of heaviness. I choose to praise You in the midst of my difficulties, knowing You are aware of all I have walked through and will bring good to me through life's challenges in a way that only You could. I love You precious Savior!*



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The trust we put in God honors Him much,  
and draws down great graces.

Brother Lawrence

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## A FINAL WORD

As our time together draws to an end, I want to speak a final word of encouragement over you. Over the past weeks, your stony path of real life may have grown smooth like river stones, or morphed into jagged cliff-size boulders ... wherever you find yourself, I know the road has not been an easy one.

I recognize it might feel like a kick in the gut to be told to “trust God” when your life is falling apart ... when you’re the one who has received the cancer diagnosis or divorce decree or planning an unexpected funeral or loneliness engulfs your days. Yet, this I know – whatever form your stony path may take – He is with you. He is aware of all you face, and He will never forsake you.

I know it’s painful. There’s even an added layer to the ache when friends offer “helpful” hints on what they would do in your situation. Or provide “explanations” as to why you’re facing such trials. And maybe, like Lazarus’s sisters, you find yourself crying out in your prayers, “*God, if You had been here ...*” that’s okay ... wrestle it out with the Lord. Talk to Him. *But don’t stop there.*

Grab your coffee, a notebook and a pen, then open His Word. Read what He did in the life of Gideon or Moses or Joseph or Job. Read aloud the Psalms as you turn them into your own prayers ... allow Him to knead the Truth of His Word into your spirit, even as the enemy’s lies are exposed. Don’t isolate yourself, pick up the phone or text a friend who will listen and remind you of the Truth. Be patient with yourself ....

In the end, just keep putting one foot in front of the other and choose to take Him at His Word. Refuse to give in to the pull of depression and despair. You are a child of the Most High God, He



will not fail you. Remember, He gave the life of His Son for you, that's how much He loves you ....

Trust Him no matter the circumstance. He will either blow your mind by parting the waters of your Red Sea scenario, or give you grace to walk *through* your sea of difficulty.

Trust His plan. Trust His hand. Trust His heart. *Trust Him*. One day dear one, you will see Him face to face. And on that day, you will see that He Himself was walking the stony path ***with you*** ....



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Trust in the Lord with all your heart and  
lean not on your own understanding.

Proverbs 3:5

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## Stony Paths

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Becky White is a contributing author of ***Whispers of Wisdom for Single Mom's*** and ***Every Good and Perfect Gift***, both Published by Barbour Publishing. She contributed to ***The Complete Guide to Christian Quotations***, also by Barbour. Her first published work was a poem in a 2007 edition of the BGEA Decision magazine. In addition, Becky has self-published an autobiography titled ***Come Forth as Gold***, a devotional titled ***Shelter from the Storm***, and a booklet titled ***Adversity***.



Becky and her husband attend Rock City Church and serve together at Columbus Dream Center. Becky writes a weekly devotion for her blog, *Devotions for Difficult Days*. The Whites have a family of seven grown children, eight grandchildren and 1 great-grandson. They make their home in Columbus, Ohio.

[www.DevotionsForDifficultDays.com](http://www.DevotionsForDifficultDays.com)

## Stony Paths