

# Christ Our Refuge Study Guide

## Anchored to Christ COR: Message One (050612PM)

As the end of the physical world approaches so does earth's darkest spiritual hour.

Satan knows that God has plans to save "*a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands...*" (Revelation 7:9).

So to try to thwart God's harvest of precious souls and to prevent the world from coming to Christ, Satan has deployed legions of liars. False sign posts—all pointing people away from Christ. This is not new to our generation. False teachers have been a part of the landscape from the start.

Things were so bad one hundred years ago, that the greatest Bible teachers of that generation banded together to put up the flag of truth. What those men did is now a common form of mockery in the world. They sat down and declared what were the nonnegotiables of the faith.

But as we open to Matthew 24 again, we are opening to what I consider one of the saddest doctrines in the Bible--the teaching in God's Word about the antichrist, and Satan's all out, final assault upon the Gospel.

**When Christ returns there is a powerful, pervasive, and universal leader who speaks eternally damnable lies--backed by the most believable signs and wonders ever witnessed on planet earth.**

Please open with me to the next section of Matthew 24.

- *Matthew 24:15 "Therefore **when you see the 'abomination of desolation,'** spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand),*
- *Matthew 24:24 For false christs [pseudo-christs] and false prophets [pseudo-prophets] **will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.***

At the end of days, Satan sends to earth the expression of all of mankind's desires in the person of the antichrist. In a very short time **almost all of the earth** will follow him! That is the saddest commentary on the fallen heart of humanity there could ever be. Wanting always the wrong choice.

The antichrist, like Satan—comes to kill, steal, and destroy. Christ, on the other hand came to offer an abundant life. If you have never trusted Christ as your Savior, I would urge you to receive him today. When you call upon Christ to save you from your sins, God delivers you from the power of darkness and their eternally damnable lies--and brings you into the wonderful kingdom of His Son.

Today, just as during the Tribulation years, there will be only two types of people on the planet—truth lovers and truth haters. Open now to 2 Thessalonians 2, and stand with me to see that dark hour.

*2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. 3 **Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. 5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 6 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.***

## **The Fundamentals of the Faith**

At the end of days, truth is under attack and lies will abound.

That is why Jesus said watch out for false teachers and counterfeit religion. When faced with a similar situation at the turn of the century, evangelicals produced a work called the FUNDAMENTALS in 1909-1915. The writers read like a Who's Who of Christianity of the day: R.A. Torrey [of Biola], B.B. Warfield [of Westminster Seminary], J.C. Ryle [devotional writer], G. Campbell Morgan [an expositor pastor], C.I. Scofield [of the study Bible], James M. Gray [MBI], A.T. Pierson [devotional writer]and so on.

These men distilled down the fundamental beliefs that distinguish a true believer from a false or counterfeit one. They boiled down all theology into seven essentials. They then presented and explained these seven doctrines in a multi-volume set of books called "**The Fundamentals**". Here is their list of the seven essentials.

**1. INSPIRATION:** The Inspiration and Reliable Historicity of the Bible.

**2. CREATION:** The error of Evolutionism and Darwinism.

**3. DOCTRINE:** The naming of the cults' errors [Jehovah Witness, Mormonism, Christian Science, Spiritism].

**4. DEPRAVITY:** The reality of sin.

**5. SUBSTITUTION:** Biblical salvation by faith through the grace of God.

**6. IMPUTATION:** The errors of Roman Catholicism.

**7. CHRISTOLOGY:** The Deity, the work, and the personal visible return of Christ.

### How to Spot a False Teacher

These men were making a “most wanted” poster for believers—showing who the enemy of the truth was. So how do we spot these false teachers? What do these signposts pointing people in the wrong direction believe and teach? What is the message promoted by Satan’s legion of liars?

Often it is not what they say—but what they don’t say that identifies them! What do false teachers deny? How do you spot a false teacher? There are clear signs of an apostate or false teacher:

1. **THEY DENY CHRIST IS THE ONLY WAY.** 1 Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some *will depart from the faith*, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,
2. **THEY DENY OUR LIBERTY IN CHRIST.** 1 Timothy 4:3 *forbidding to marry*, and *commanding to abstain* from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.
3. **THEY DENY DIVINE POWER.** 2 Timothy 3:4-5 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness *but denying its power*. And from such people turn away!
4. **THEY DENY BIBLICAL TRUTH.** 2 Timothy 3:8 *Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith;*
5. **THEY DENY THE NECESSITY OF SOUND DOCTRINE.** 2 Timothy 4:3-4 *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*
6. **THEY DENY THE DEITY OF CHRIST.** 2 Peter 2:1 *But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them -- bringing swift destruction on themselves. (NIV)*
7. **THEY DENY THE REALITY OF CHRIST COMING AGAIN.** 2 Peter 3:3-4 *knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, 4 and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.”*

8. **THEY DENY THE NECESSITY OF PERSONAL HOLINESS.** *Jude 18 how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts.*
9. **THEY DENY THE NECESSITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.** *Jude 19 These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.*

## **The World Detached from Truth--Shipwreck**

Love of the truth, as we saw earlier in II Thessalonians 2, is the proof of salvation. Lost ones never receive a love of the truth so they never seek out and find Christ's offer of salvation.

To not love the truth leads to “shipwreck”; it meant that the ship you trusted to take you across the dangerous waters had failed you and you were not going to make it. If you lose your ship in the midst of the sea there is usually no hope, no place to go—and certain death.

*Think of the implications of being in a doomed boat. Not believing the truth about God means that all who count on a lie to get them safely to the other shore—are lost forever!*

Remember that Paul uses this word to describe those who thrust away sound doctrine and try to sail on their own, without Christ's way, truth and life.

1 Timothy 1:19-20 having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, ***concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck***, 20 of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom ***I delivered to Satan*** that they may learn not to blaspheme.

What can cause a soul to be shipwrecked?

- False teachers
- Belief in a false Christ

That was one of Christ's constant warnings. The most dangerous shipwreck is not the one that merely endangers your body. Jesus warns that false teaching can sink your soul as well.

*So how do we stay safe as these dark days cast their shadow across society, media, culture, and every other realm of daily life? Only one way—check the anchor of your soul.*

*When the world darkens, culture crumbles, and truth dies—you know the end of the world is near. It is then that Jesus warned that the church would fill up with fruitless counterfeits. When that happens it is time for believers to brace for the storm that we know is coming. The waves will only increase. Spiritual darkness will only deepen as deceptions grow. These are days when we who know and love the Lord Jesus should reach into our hearts and grab onto our anchor line and feel it strongly holding us securely—tugging us homeward.*

## Jesus is Our Anchor

*Hebrews 6:11-12, 18-20 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance (plerophoreo - to overflowing) of hope until the end, 12 that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. 18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have **fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope** set before us. 19 **This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, 20 where **the forerunner has entered for us**, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. NKJV***

# Christ: Our City of Refuge

## COR: Message Two (050619AM)

Last week we saw how Christ our forerunner has forever anchored our souls safely in heaven. If that were all there was for us in Hebrews 6—that would be enough for a lifetime of hope. But there is more.

Turn with me again to Hebrews 6:17. Look again at these precious words of security, comfort and hope—because there is so much MORE from God's Word for us!

- *Hebrews 6:17-20 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, 18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled **for refuge** to lay hold of the hope set before us. 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, 20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*

God has provided us with "strong consolation (NAS, encouragement)" (v. 18). "We who have fled for refuge" is a New Testament allusion to an incredible Old Testament example for us today. These were cities God had provided for people living in Israel in the Old Testament times, who sought protection from avengers for an accidental killing (cf. Num. 35; Deut. 19; Josh. 20).

How do we run to Him? He tells us we come by "laying hold of the hope set before us" (v. 18). What is that hope? It is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The only way to have a strong confidence and a steadfast hope, is to seek refuge in God and embrace Jesus Christ, who is our only hope of salvation[1].

The Greek word in Hebrews that is translated "refuge" (in KJV, NKJV, and NASB) is the same one used in the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament) in the passages describing the cities of refuge. The writer of Hebrews is telling us that the only way to experience the power of God that saves us is when we run to Him in desperation--for refuge.

And to understand one of the clearest explanations of entering into the refuge of Christ, turn with me to Joshua 20. When Israel entered the Promised Land, God gave them a constant reminder of His salvation. This reminder was ordered by God to be set up in the Land as a visible symbol of Him as God their Savior 24/7/365 across the entire land.

What was that reminder? A strategically placed group of six cities called the Cities of Refuge. There is actually a whole chapter of the Bible (Joshua 20) devoted to these cities. There are many pictures of salvation in God's Word—Jesus used the serpent lifted up, the manna, Paul used the rock, and both used the Passover lamb. But one of the most beautiful, the most powerful, the most amazing pictures of Jesus Christ is tucked away in one of those back corners of the Scriptures. That picture is one that shows Jesus is always waiting, His arms are always open, the door is never locked—the clearest picture of Christ as Savior is seen in the cities of refuge.

- *"And they [assigned] Kedesh in Galilee in Mount Naphtali, and Shechem in Mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah. And on the other side [of the] Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. These were the cities assigned for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger who sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person without intent might flee the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation." (Joshua 20:7-9)*

Amazingly to me, that archaic system of justice from the Old Testament shows up, of all places, in the New Testament.

## Cities of Refuge

The Cities of Refuge (Numbers 35, Joshua 20, Deuteronomy 4, 19), remind us of Christ Jesus our hiding place. God commanded that when His people came into possession of the land six Cities of Refuge should be appointed, to which he who slew a man, through ignorance or unintentionally, might flee from the avenger of blood who, according to Eastern custom, would pursue and kill the man-slayer. Three on each side of the Jordan River-which were provided for a man-slayer guilty of second-degree murder.

Those cities of refuge portray how Christ shelters the sinner from death. It was a very marvelous provision for a man who accidentally killed someone. Maybe the one whom he killed had a hotheaded brother who wanted vengeance. So the fugitive could escape to a city of refuge where he would be protected and his case tried. The elders of the city would investigate the case. If he was acquitted of intentional killing he must remain within the city until the death of the high priest. [2]

We have fled to Jesus Christ, and He is our eternal refuge. As our High Priest, He will never die (Heb. 7:23-25); and we have eternal salvation. No avenger can touch us, because He has already died and arisen from the dead[3].

These six cities of refuge are beautiful types of Christ, to whom we "have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Heb. 6:18). Step back with me into the ancient world of the Bible, and listen to this wonderful picture of Christ that God built into their daily lives. To do so look with me at these truths about the Old Testament description of the cities of refuge.

**1. God Himself appointed these cities of refuge.** This was an act of grace, for all men are sinners and deserve to die. Moses did not choose the cities, to remind us that the Law cannot save anyone. It was not an earthly priest who appointed them, to remind us that religion in any form can't save anyone. These cities and the Christ they picture both came from the loving heart of God. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16).

**2. God's Word announced these cities of refuge.** The six cities are named in Joshua 20:7-8, and they could never be changed. On the authority of the Word of God, a slayer could enter a city and no one could forbid him! So with our salvation: it is promised to us in the Word,

and this can never change. There were cities in Israel that were larger and more prominent, but none of them could shelter the sinner. There are many “religions” today, but there is only one way of salvation as announced in God’s Word—faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).

**3. Anyone could access these cities of refuge.** Now we come to the most wonderful part of the truths of these cities of refuge. They are the clearest pictures of grace in all of the Bible!

First, they were in central places on both sides of the Jordan, so they *were easy to reach* from any place in the country. God expressly commanded that roads were to be made to these cities (Deut. 19:3). If you look at a map of the Holy Land, you find that the six cities were arranged so that no tribe was too far from the place of safety. On the west side of Jordan were Kedesh in the north, Shechem in the central area, and Hebron in the south. Right across the river on the east side (where Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh chose to settle) were Golan in the north, Ramoth in the central section, and Bezer in the south. These cities were accessible. Some of them were located on mounts so as to be even more prominent.

From Jewish literature we can add some further detail about the highways. They were carefully repaired every spring, after the rains and bad weather of winter. Further, bridges were built where needed so that people did not have to run down into a ravine but could go straight across, taking the shortest possible route to the city. At every crossroad were special signs which said, “Refuge!” and pointed in the direction of the city. These signposts had to be large enough so that a man running hard could easily read them. Runners, learned in the law of God, were stationed to guide the fugitives to the place of safety.[4] We can picture a man coming up the road. Another man is pursuing him, sword out. The first man, having no time to use a magnifying glass, approaches the sign and sees the big words, “Refuge” magnified! He runs to the city and is safe.

Second, the cities of refuge were *open to all* — to the Israelite, the stranger, and sojourner. Joshua 20:9 says, “that whosoever killed a person ...” (KJV). What verse sounds like this—that whosoever...” Right! John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

Third, from nonbiblical sources we hear that the great doors of these cities were **always left open** and *never locked*. We can see why. Otherwise a man might die while beating on the door.

Fourth, these sources also tell us that each city of refuge was stocked with food. It was *a completely sufficient refuge*, then, not only providing legal protection, but also meeting a man’s needs once he was inside. **The cities of refuge were completely adequate for the needs of the endangered ones.** So long as the slayer remained in the city, he was safe, and he would be freed when the high priest died.

Fifth, we know from the Bible itself, of course, that if a killer did not flee to a city of refuge there was *no other hope*. Note that the slayer is told to flee to the city. Such a person could not afford to delay!

## Christ is Portrayed by the Cities of Refuge

The similarities between the cities of refuge and Christ, our refuge, are striking. We can compare them point for point.

- First, ***Christ is easy to reach***. We may cast ourselves upon Christ at any time, in any place. The Church is to be the teller of this good news. The Church is to cry, “Refuge! Refuge!” to the lost world. This emphasis is made at the very end of the Bible in the book of Revelation: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17). So has the Saviour placed Himself within the reach of all, even of such as are in the utmost peril of vengeance. Jewish tradition declares that there were posts at the cross roads with “Refuge! Refuge!” upon them, pointing out the way.
- Second, ***Christ is open to all*** — the Jew and the Gentile, the Greek and the barbarian, to all people. Listen to the echoes of Christ's open arms throughout the Scriptures: Genesis 3:9 Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?”; Isaiah 45:22 “Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other; Matthew 11:28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; Revelation 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.
- Third, ***Christ never locks His gates***. There is no need to wake Him. He is infinite; He is God; He is never asleep. We do not have to beat upon the door and die because He does not open it. Many have stood by a deathbed and seen men believe in the last moments of life. It is good that there is no gate to unlock and that men can enter quickly. What a picture of Christ! Certainly the “way to the city” is clear! No one need ever wonder how to come to Him, for we come to Him by faith. He will never turn any sinner away (John 6:37). High roads led to each city, and their gates were always open.
- Fourth, ***Christ is a completely sufficient refuge***. Christ's death in space-time history is completely adequate to meet our need for refuge from the true moral guilt which we have. It is final because of who He is. He is the infinite second person of the Trinity; therefore, His death has infinite value.

Furthermore, the cities of refuge were not only a legal protection, but also had a supply of food. So Christ not only makes a Christian legally safe through His propitiatory death, but He supplies the believer with great riches. God the Father becomes our father; the Holy Spirit moves in and is the agent by which the whole Trinity produces Christ's fruit through us.

Even the suburbs or borders of the city were a sufficient security to the offender, v. 26, 27. So there is virtue even in the hem of Christ's garment for the healing and saving of poor sinners. If we cannot reach to a full assurance, we may comfort ourselves in a good hope through grace[5].

Fifth, ***if we do not flee to the refuge*** which God has given to us at such a great price, ***there is no help for us***. Hebrews relates this negative emphasis to the Old Testament: “He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath

counted the blood of the covenant, with which he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" (Heb. 10:28, 29). There isn't one of us who does not stand in that situation. We have heard the gospel, and if in the Old Testament ignoring God's law brought death, what about us if we despise the work of Christ and the grace which He showers upon us? Nor can lost sinners today afford to delay in fleeing to the only refuge, Jesus Christ.[6]

So Christ is easy to reach, His arms are open to all, His entrance is never locked, He is a completely sufficient refuge, and He is the only hope. How wonderful. But there is so much more as we examine the differences between the cities of refuge and Christ our refuge. Christ is portrayed by the cities of refuge but He is so much better!

### **Christ is Better Than Any Cities of Refuge**

**Christ is better because He is nearer than any city of refuge.** A runner could fall and not be able to get to a fugitive in time to shelter him within the walls of safety, but a man who looks to Christ can never fail. The Bible makes a specific promise: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). In fact, Jesus says, "I stand at the door and knock" (Rev. 3:20). He Himself seeks us.[7]

**Christ is better because He offers only Permanent Refuge.** Hebrews also speaks of Christ as "the forerunner [who] is for us entered" (Heb. 6:20). That means that He has entered into God's presence and that we can enter, too. When do we enter this refuge? I would suggest we enter at three different times.

- First, we enter in once for all at the moment we cast ourselves upon Christ and accept Him as our Savior. We are declared justified by God the judge on the basis of Christ's finished work. In Romans 5:11 Paul uses the aorist tense, indicating our justification is a past thing, completed forever. If we are saved, we are saved. Romans 5:11 And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom **we have now received the reconciliation**. Remember what we saw two weeks ago—justification means that God has no record that we even sinned. Our sins are paid for, put on Christ's account and gone forever!
- Second, we enter into this refuge as Christians in every daily moment when we claim the blood of Christ to cover a specific sin. 1 John 1:7-9 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- Third, at that great moment when we die or when the Lord returns, we will enter in perfectly and completely. Hebrews 7:24-25 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

**Christ is better because He died only for the guilty.** The biggest difference is that the cities protected only the innocent. They were only for the man who killed by mistake. Christ died for the guilty, for the deliberate sinner. Who is that deliberate sinner? Every one of us can say, "It

is I!” How is it possible that the holy God would accept those that are guilty? It is not by giving up His holiness. He does not devalue that, or we would have no moral absolute in the universe. Rather, the reason Christ is able to be our Redeemer is that He is a high priest and the sacrifice He gave was His own death.

A man stayed in a city of refuge until the death of the high priest, and then left. Christ is our high priest. He has died once for all, and He lives forever. So though we are legally guilty before the God who is there, when we cast ourselves upon Him we are free forever. This does not suggest that we may “leave Christ” and lose our salvation, for we do not build doctrines on types; rather we interpret types on the basis of doctrines. The true Christian can never perish, but by failing to “abide in Christ” he or she opens the door to spiritual and physical dangers. Our High Priest will never die, and because He lives, we live also.

- Hebrews 7:23-27 says this strongly: *And they, truly, were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death; but this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore, **he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him**, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's; for this he did once, when he offered up himself (Heb. 7:23-27)*

We are not like a man who runs to a city of refuge and is acquitted after a trial because he is innocent. We are guilty. If you are still a non-Christian, run to Christ, for God's own promises say, “Refuge! Refuge!”

If you are a Christian, take Christ as your sufficient refuge; bring your specific sins under the work of Christ and in all the vicissitudes of life, moment and moment by moment, through the whole of your life.

There is one point of contrast between the cities and Christ: when the slayer came to the city, he was admitted but he was also tried. With us, there is no trial, for we are already condemned! The elders of the city only protected someone who was innocent of murder, but Christ receives guilty sinners. What grace! John 3:18 “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

*“What a picture this is for us today! This reveals that Christ is our refuge. Listen to what this means— I have already been carried into court, and at the trial I was found guilty. I was a sinner. The penalty which was leveled against me was death—and it has already been executed. Christ bore the penalty for me, you see. Because He died in my place, I am free. I have been delivered from the penalty of sin; never do I have to answer for it again. I am free now to go out and serve Him. I now have a High Priest, a resurrected Savior, to whom I can go.*

*What a wonderful picture of my Savior this gives! The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our*

*admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor. 10:11). “Ensamples” are types. Millions of things could have been recorded, but God chose to record only these things because they enable us to grow in our understanding of Him and our relationship to Him[8].”*

Now, can I show you something of the depths and heights of Christ's richness toward us? Look again with me at that ancient list of city names in Joshua 20.

Do you remember from the Old Testament that often Hebrew names are also words that have a distinct meaning? And do you remember that God often points out that a name also means something in addition to being a name—to make a point?

Take for instance David’s encounter with Abigail’s husband Nabal. His name means in Hebrew ‘fool’, and God shows that is just what he was. God points out Jacob’s name means deceiver as he was, and so on many times through the Old Testament this dual usage of a word is seen.

Now can I read Joshua 20 again and give you the meaning of each city that God names? Here we go: *“And they [assigned] Kedesh in Galilee in Mount Naphtali, and Shechem in Mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah. And on the other side [of the] Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. These were the cities assigned for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger who sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person without intent might flee the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation.” (Joshua 20:7-9)*

- KEDESH is not only a city name it also means a "holy place" or “righteousness”.
- SHECHEM is not only a city name it also means “shoulder”.
- HEBRON is not only a city name it also means “fellowship”.
- BEZER is not only a city name it also means a "stronghold" or “fortress”
- RAMOTH is not only a city name it also means "exalted" or “heights”
- GOLAN is not only a city name it also means "separated."

Now listen to how each of those city names portray Christ's refuge offered for us to lay hold of every day, every hour, and every moment of our lives.

### **Christ is also Portrayed as Our Lifelong Refuge**

In looking over the meaning of the names of these cities of refuge, we are struck with the distinctive characteristic of each. They are individually showing forth some particular feature of the character of Christ; and when taken as a whole, they illustrate the sufficiency of Christ as a Refuge to meet all of our need, and the need of all. To see the adequacy of Jesus Christ to meet our every need, consider the names of the cities. These six cities of refuge all point to Him, and enable us to sing with a restful, joyful heart, "God is our refuge and our strength." [9]

**KEDESH** means a "holy place" or “righteousness,” and this is our first need. When we come to Christ, He gives us His righteousness and forgives all our sins (2 Cor 5:21, Col. 2:13). Here was the *refuge for the unclean*. The holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ is the only hope of the sinful.

Only that which is clean can cleanse. The unrighteous can only find refuge in the righteousness of God. The finished work on the accursed tree affords a holy hiding-place, for only there are the unclean made holy. To that blest fountain of Thy blood, Incarnate God, I fly. There let me wash my spotted soul, From crimes of deepest dye. In wonder lost, with trembling joy We take the pardon of our God; Pardon for crimes of deepest dye, A pardon bought with Jesus' blood: Who is a pardoning God like thee? Or who has grace so rich and free?

**SHECHEM** means “shoulder,” and suggests that we find in Christ a resting place, a friend on whom we can lay our burdens. “Can I hold out?” is always the question a new believer asks. The answer is, “He will hold you!” Here was the *refuge for the weary*. (Matt. 11:28; Luke 15:5) The Lord Jesus is the strong Savior. Most believers have found that they can find no rest in ruling themselves. But when faith comes, we lean not only on His merit, but also on His almightiness. A tired child finds refuge on the shoulder of its loving father. And the Lord Jesus has borne our burden upon His shoulder, even as the lost sheep found both safety and rest upon the shepherd's shoulders.

**HEBRON** means “fellowship,” suggesting our fellowship with God in Christ, and also our fellowship with other believers. So the Lord Jesus is the *refuge for the homeless*. Like Noah's dove, man is spiritually a homeless wanderer. There was no rest, no safety, and no fellowship outside of that ark. The repentant homeless prodigal found a refuge in his father's house and in his father's fellowship. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only real Hebron for the soul. There is no fellowship with the Father except through Him, ...truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." (I John 1:3)

**BEZER** means "stronghold" or “fortress,” suggesting the protection and victory we have in Christ. The safest place in the world is in the will of God. Jesus Christ is the *refuge for the helpless*. We are not only sinners, but we are also helplessly sinful. In the case of the one guilty of second-degree murder, there was to be no such thing as self-protection. And so it is with us sinners. We are "without strength." "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." (Prov. 18: 10) When we flee from the justice of God into the mercy of God, we will find a stronghold that can never give way. No matter how helpless, here you are eternally safe. The Lord Jesus is the only Bezer. Other hiding-places will fail and fall like the walls of Jericho.

**RAMOTH** means "exalted" or “heights” and reminds us that believers are seated “together in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 2:4–10). Sin always leads a person down, but Christ lifts us up; and one day we shall be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air! And so our Lord is the *refuge for the hopeless*. By nature we are not only without strength, but also without hope in the world.(Eph. 2:12) Those who hope in this world system of politics and religion have no hope. The Lord Jesus is our hope, exalted at the Father's right hand, with a name which is above every name, high and lifted up. He is our Ramoth. When you are downcast, and feeling yourself hopeless in this world, look up. During Noah's flood, there was no mountain that could save. Only those who were lifted up by the ark were saved. Jesus Christ is the Ark of our hope and eternal security.

**GOLAN** means "separated." God has appointed His Son to be the *refuge for those who are tempted*. We are usually tempted much by the world when we tamper much with the world. We have not fled to the Lord Jesus as our city of separation. He separated Himself for our sakes-for He was separate from sinners-that He might succor those who are tempted. Golan is the last of the six cities which are mentioned. Most of us would have to confess that separation from worldly ambition, worldly pleasures, and worldly fame is just about the last refuge which we seek. "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach." (Hebrews 13:13)

Is Christ your city of Refuge? Is He easy to reach to you? Are His arms open to you? Do you see His entrance as never locked, and that He is a completely sufficient refuge? Do you see that there is no other hope but Him? Then He is YOUR city of refuge.

**Do you see--Christ is better because He is nearer than any city of refuge.** Christ is better because He *offers only Permanent Refuge*. And, Christ is better because He *died only for the guilty*.

**Have you fled for life long refuge to the One who is the refuge for the unclean, the refuge for the weary; the refuge for the homeless; the refuge for the helpless, the refuge for the hopeless, and the refuge for those who are tempted.**

### **Finding Refuge through Christ's Word**

Now to apply what we have learned about Christ our forerunner (prodromos) who pulls us safely home; and Christ our city of refuge—let me show you how to find refuge each day in the Bible!

Go back and look again at Hebrews 6:18-19 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the **hope** set before us. 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil,

The third Hebrew word that God gives us is describing **CLINGING HOPE**--the word is **BATACH (982): HOPE THAT INSPIRES DEEPER TRUST.**

**What does God seek as our response to hard times? Clinging to Him as our refuge--is the resounding answer.**

Turn with me to the most well known verse in the Bible using this special word. Proverbs 3:5.

- Proverbs 3:5 **Trust** [literally cling to; Hebrew *batach*; LXX *peitho*] the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;

Here *batach* is used in the sense of hope that comes from casting one's total future upon God as a little child and trusting Him for everything. This word is most often translated to trust or to have confidence in someone-usually God. But in some contexts it is definitely used to mean hope, as

in the great prophetic Twenty-second Psalm. The Messiah's thoughts while suffering on the cross are predicted here[10]:

- Psalms 22:9 KJV "But thou [God] art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me HOPE [Hebrew *batach*; LXX *elpis*] when I was upon my mother's breasts" Psalm 37:3-5 **Trust in** [LXX *elpidzo*] the Lord, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. 4 Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. 5 Commit your way to the Lord, **Trust** also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.
- Psalm 40:3 He has put a new song in my mouth—Praise to our God; Many will see it and fear, **And will trust** [cling to] the Lord.
- Psalm 56:3-4, 11 Whenever I am afraid, **I will trust** [cling to] You. 4 In God (I will praise His word), In God I **have put my trust**; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me. 11 In God **I have put my trust**; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?
- Psalm 112:7 He will not be afraid of evil tidings; His heart is steadfast, **trusting** [clinging to] the Lord.

Old Testament *batach* is in the LXX the New Testament *elpis/elpidzo*. New Testament usage of *elpidzo*:

- 2 Corinthians 1:10 who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we **trust** that He will still deliver us,
- Philippians 2:19 But I **trust** in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state.
- 1 Timothy 4:10 For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we **trust** in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.
- 1 Timothy 5:5 Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, **trusts** in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.
- 1 Timothy 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to **trust** in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.
- Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things **hoped** for, the evidence of things not seen.
- 1 Peter 1:13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your **hope** fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;
- 1 Peter 3:5 For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who **trusted** in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands,

New Testament usage of *elpis*:

- Romans 5:2, 4-5 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in **hope** of the glory of God. 4 and perseverance, character; and character, **hope**. 5 Now **hope** does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.
- Romans 15:4, 13 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have **hope**. 13 Now may

the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in **hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit.

- Colossians 1:5 because of the **hope** which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel,
- Titus 2:13 looking for the blessed **hope** and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,
- 1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living **hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
- 1 Peter 1:21 who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and **hope** are in God.
- 1 Peter 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the **hope** that is in you, with meekness and fear;
- 1 John 3:3 And everyone who has this **hope** in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

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[1] John MacArthur, *Saved Without A Doubt*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books) 1992.

[2] McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

[3] Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

[4] Hodgkin, Christ in all, p.

[5] Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997.

[6] Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*, (InterVarsity Press: IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament ) Downer's Grove, IL.

[7] Schaeffer, Francis A., *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1985.

[8] McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

[9] Roy Gustafson, *In His Land Seeing Is Believing*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: World Wide Publications, 1980, p. 65-68.

[10] Hal Lindsey, *The Terminal Generation*. Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company: 1976, p. 95.

# The Safest Spot in the Universe

## COR: Message Three (050626AM)

**The safest spot on earth** is just over 700 miles from us this morning in Colorado. It is a super secure military command center called NORAD. There in the Rockies, under Cheyenne Mountain, a mile deep in the granite corridors, is the heart of America's missile defense center.

The main entrance to the complex is approximately one-third of a mile from the North Portal via a tunnel which leads to a pair of steel Blast Doors each weighing 25 tons. Behind the 25-ton blast doors is a steel building complex built within a 4.5 acre grid of excavated chambers and tunnels and surrounded by 2,000 feet of granite. Excavation began for the new NORAD Combat Operations Center in Cheyenne Mountain in May 1961. The excavation was nearly complete one year later.

Built at the height of the Cold War and able to withstand any bomb blast, chemical or biological weapon--it is self sustaining for those inside for two years. But only if you are able to get there in time to avoid the attack.

**The safest spot in the universe**, that is even safer than Cheyenne Mountain, is also the closest. Closer than that military center 700 miles from here, closer than your safe room, closer than a shelter, closer than anything else--is the refuge God has designed.

Jesus Christ our hope, our refuge, and our salvation--is one thought away, one prayer away. He is as close as a cry, as close as an out-stretched hand, or an upturned heart. Anyone, anywhere can instantly arrive in that safest of all places--from any location.

We have already seen Christ our forerunner who has forever anchored our souls safely in heaven. If that were all there was for us in Hebrews 6—that would be enough for a lifetime of hope. But there is more.

Turn with me again to Hebrews 6 as we look again at these precious words of security, comfort and hope—because there is so much MORE from God's Word for us!

*Hebrews 6:17-20 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, 18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled **for refuge** to lay hold of the hope set before us. 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, 20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*

This refuge is the safest spot in the universe. But how do we get there? God's Word says we come by "laying hold of the hope set before us" (v. 18). What is that hope? It is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Now turn with me back a few pages to 1 Timothy 1:1. As we stand to listen to Paul, we will find the answer. *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope.”*

The safest spot in the universe is in the embrace of Jesus. The only way to have assurance of salvation, a strong confidence, and a steadfast hope, is to seek refuge in God by embracing Jesus Christ, who is our only hope of salvation[1].

Remember that the Greek word in Hebrews that is translated “refuge” (in KJV, NKJV, and NASB) is the same one used in the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament) in the passages describing the cities of refuge? We saw that last week.

The writer of Hebrews is telling us that the only way to experience the power of God that saves us is when we run to Christ in desperation--for refuge to that safest place.

And to understand one of the clearest explanations of entering into the refuge of Christ, turn with me to Joshua 20.

When Israel entered the Promised Land, God gave them a constant reminder of His salvation. This reminder was ordered by God to be set up in the Land as a visible symbol of Him as God their Savior 24/7/365 across the entire land.

What was that reminder? A strategically placed group of six cities called the Cities of Refuge. There is actually a whole chapter of the Bible (Joshua 20) devoted to these cities. The most beautiful, the most powerful, the most amazing picture of Jesus Christ is tucked away in one of those back corners of the Scriptures. That picture is one that shows Jesus is always waiting, His arms are always open, the door is never locked—the clearest picture of Christ as Savior is seen in the cities of refuge.

*“And they [assigned] Kedesh in Galilee in Mount Naphtali, and Shechem in Mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah. And on the other side [of the] Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. These were the cities assigned for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger who sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person without intent might flee the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation.” (Joshua 20:7-9)*

### **Those Cities of Refuge Were Wonderful**

**Anyone could access these cities of refuge** because they *were easy to reach* from any place in the country. God expressly commanded that roads were to be made to these cities (Deut. 19:3). These cities were accessible. Some of them were located on mounts so as to be even more prominent.

**Anyone could access these cities of refuge** because they were *open to all* — to the Israelite, the stranger, and sojourner. (Numbers 35:15) Joshua 20:9 says, “that whosoever killed a person ...”

(KJV). What verse sounds like this—that whosoever...” Right! John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

**Anyone could access these cities of refuge** because the great doors of these cities were **always left open** and *never locked*. We can see why. Otherwise a man might die while beating on the door.

**Anyone could access these cities of refuge** because they were *a completely sufficient refuge*, then, not only providing legal protection, but also meeting a man's needs once he was inside. **The cities of refuge were completely adequate for the needs of the endangered ones.** So long as the slayer remained in the city, he was safe, and he would be freed when the high priest died.

**Anyone could access these cities of refuge** because there was *no other hope*. Note that the slayer is told to flee to the city. Such a person could not afford to delay!

### **Christ Was Portrayed by the Cities of Refuge**

The similarities between the cities of refuge and Christ, our refuge, are striking. We can compare them point for point.

Anyone can come to Him for *Christ is easy to reach*. We may cast ourselves upon Christ at any time, in any place. The Church is to be the teller of this good news. The Church is to cry, “Refuge! Refuge!” to the lost world. This emphasis is made at the very end of the Bible in the book of Revelation: “And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him that heareth say, “Come!” And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17). So has the Savior placed Himself within the reach of all, even of such as are in the utmost peril of His wrath. Jewish tradition declares that there were posts at the cross roads with “Refuge! Refuge!” upon them, pointing out the way.

Anyone can come to Him for *Christ is open to all* — the Jew and the Gentile, the Greek and the barbarian, to all people. Listen to the echoes of Christ's open arms throughout the Scriptures: Genesis 3:9 Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?”; Isaiah 45:22 “Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other; Matthew 11:28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; Revelation 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

Anyone can come to Him for *Christ is a completely sufficient refuge*. Christ's death in space-time history is completely adequate to meet our need for refuge from the true moral guilt which we have. It is final because of who He is. He is the infinite second person of the Trinity; therefore, His death has infinite value. And just as even the suburbs or borders of the city were a sufficient security to the offender. Numbers 35:26-27 “*But if the manslayer at any time goes outside the limits of the city of refuge where he fled, 27 and the avenger of blood finds him outside the limits of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kills the manslayer, he shall not be guilty of blood.*” So there is virtue even in the hem of Christ's garment for the healing and

saving of poor sinners. If we cannot reach to a full assurance, we may comfort ourselves in a good hope through grace[2].

Anyone can come to Him for *if we do not flee to the refuge* which God has given to us at such a great price, *there is no help for us*. Hebrews relates this negative emphasis to the Old Testament: “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, with which he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” (Heb. 10:28, 29). There isn’t one of us who does not stand in that situation. We have heard the gospel, and if in the Old Testament ignoring God’s law brought death, what about us if we despise the work of Christ and the grace which He showers upon us? Nor can lost sinners today afford to delay in fleeing to the only refuge, Jesus Christ.[3]

Anyone can come to Him for *Christ never locks His gates*. Jesus told us that He is the Door—and we know that He is the Door that is never shut, never locked, never barred. To the very last words of the Bible in Revelation 22 He is still saying, “Come.” There is no need to wake Him. He is infinite; He is God; He is never asleep. We do not have to beat upon the door and die because He does not open it. Many have stood by a deathbed and seen sinners believe in the last moments of life. It is good that there is no gate to unlock and that men can enter quickly. What a picture of Christ! Certainly the “way to the city” is clear! No one need ever wonder how to come to Him, for we come to Him by faith. He will never turn any sinner away (John 6:37). High roads led to each city, and their gates were always open.

So Christ is easy to reach, His arms are open to all, His entrance is never locked, He is a completely sufficient refuge, and He is the only hope. How wonderful. But there is so much more as we examine the differences between the cities of refuge and Christ our refuge. Christ is portrayed by the cities of refuge, but He is so much better!

### **But--Christ is Better than Any City of Refuge**

There are three reasons why Jesus is better than any earthly city of refuge. They are because: He died only for the guilty which means for all of us—those cities were for only the innocent; He offers only permanent refuge—those cities were for temporary refuge; and finally He is closer than any city of refuge—it was a hard and dangerous journey for anyone trying to get to those cities.

**1. Christ is better because He died only for the guilty.** The biggest difference is that the cities of refuge protected only the innocent. They were only for the man who killed by mistake. When the slayer came to the city, he was admitted but he was also tried. With us, there is no trial, for we are already condemned!

The elders of the city only protected someone who was innocent of murder, but Christ receives guilty sinners. What grace! John 3:18 “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Christ died for the guilty, for the deliberate sinner. Who is that deliberate sinner? Every one of us can say, "It is I!" How is it possible that the holy God would accept those that are guilty? It is not by giving up His holiness. He does not devalue that, or we would have no moral absolute in the universe. Rather, the reason Christ is able to be our Redeemer is that He is a high priest and the sacrifice He gave was His own death.

"What a picture this is for us today! This reveals that Christ is our refuge. Listen to what this means— I have already been carried into court, and at the trial I was found guilty.

- I was a sinner. The penalty which was leveled against me was death—and it has already been executed. Christ bore the penalty for me, you see. Because He died in my place, I am free.
- I have been delivered from the penalty of sin; never do I have to answer for it again.
- I am free now to go out and serve Him.
- I now have a High Priest, a resurrected Savior, to whom I can go.

What a wonderful picture of my Savior this gives! The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Cor. 10:11). "Ensamples" are types. Millions of things could have been recorded, but God chose to record only these things because they enable us to grow in our understanding of Him and our relationship to Him[4]."

A person only could stay in a city of refuge until the death of the high priest, and then they left. Christ is our high priest. He has died once for all, and He lives forever. So though we are legally guilty before God, when we cast ourselves upon Him we are free forever. The true Christian can never perish, but by failing to "abide in Christ" he or she opens the door to spiritual and physical dangers.

This Old Testament picture does not suggest that we may "leave Christ" and lose our salvation, for we do not build doctrines on types; rather we interpret types on the basis of doctrines. Our High Priest will never die, and because He lives, we live also. Hebrews 7:23-27 says this strongly:

*And they, truly, were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death; but this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore, **he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him**, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's; for this he did once, when he offered up himself (Heb. 7:23-27)*

**2. Christ is better because He offers only Permanent Refuge.** Hebrews also speaks of Christ as "the forerunner [who] is for us entered" (Heb. 6:20). That means that He has entered into God's presence and that we can enter, too. When do we enter this refuge? I would suggest we enter at three different times.

- First, we enter in **once for all** at the moment we cast ourselves upon Christ and accept Him as our Savior. We are declared justified by God the judge on the basis of Christ's finished work. In Romans 5:11 Paul uses the aorist tense, indicating our justification is a past thing, completed forever. If we are saved, we are saved. Romans 5:11 And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom **we have now received the reconciliation**. Remember what we saw two weeks ago—justification means that God has no record that we even sinned. Our sins are paid for, put on Christ's account and gone forever!
- Second, we enter **every daily moment** into this refuge as Christians when we claim the blood of Christ to cover a specific sin. 1 John 1:7, 9 *“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*
- Third, **we will enter in perfectly and completely** at that great moment when we die or when the Lord returns. Hebrews 7:24-25 *“But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”*

**3. Christ is better because He is nearer than any city of refuge.** A runner could fall and not be able to get to a fugitive in time to shelter him within the walls of safety, but a man who looks to Christ can never fail. The Bible makes a specific promise: “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). In fact, Jesus says, “I stand at the door and knock” (Rev. 3:20). He Himself seeks us.[5]

How near is Christ? To answer that let me share the following story that was told by Harry A. Ironside (1876-1951) who traveled for more than 50 years as a home missionary, evangelist and Bible teacher. He was pastor of Moody Memorial Church, a visiting professor at Dallas Theological Seminary and the author of more than 60 books and pamphlets. The following is a tract he wrote called “The Way of Peace”.

Dr. Charles Berry was one of the first of the so-called New Theology men, who preached salvation by character rather than by the atoning blood of Christ, salvation by ethical culture rather than by personal faith in the Lord Jesus, salvation by reformation rather than by regeneration. Popular, eloquent and personally pleasing, he attracted large audiences, who hung upon his words and depended upon him as their spiritual mentor.

But a great change was seen in his preaching, which resulted from a new experience with God, which revolutionized his thinking. In telling his friend Dr. Jowett about it, he said that late one stormy night, as he was preparing to retire, the doorbell rang. When he went down and opened the door, there stood a poorly dressed young woman who asked if he was the minister. Upon being assured that he was, she begged him to go with her at once to get her mother in.

He thought that she meant that her poor mother was out in the storm and the darkness in an intoxicated condition; so he demurred, saying he could hardly be expected to go out and get her mother in and suggested that she see a policeman who might give the help required.

The girl explained that her mother was not drunk and added, "You must come with me. My mother is dying, and she is afraid to die. She wants to go to heaven, but she doesn't know how to get in." I told her I'd get a preacher to take her in. "Do come, Sir, and get my mother in."

He now understood that the dying woman needed someone who could show her the way of salvation, but he hesitated, thinking it was hardly a case for him. He urged the girl to go to a missionary living near the wretched locality in which she lived. But she refused. She insisted she wanted a real minister and begged him to go with her. "Do come, sir. I want you to get my mother in before it's too late. Please, sir, do come with me."

At last he consented to go, and the girl led the way to one of the worst sections of the city. In this miserable neighborhood she took him into a tenement house and up a rickety flight of stairs to a poverty-stricken room. Downstairs many men and women were drinking and carousing, and the air resounded with horrid oaths and vile language. The minister found the poor woman lying on a miserable makeshift of a bed, evidently near to death.

"I've brought him!" exclaimed the daughter. "I've got the minister from the big church where the swells go. He'll get you in, Mother. Just do what he says." "What can I do for you, my poor woman?" he inquired as kindly as he could. "Why, sir, I'm dying, and I want you to get me into heaven. I've been a great sinner, and I don't know how to get in." The minister began to speak of the necessity of a good life, of building a noble character, and how goodness always paid in the end. "You don't understand, sir!" she cried. "That won't do! I'm dying and I've lived a bad life. It's too late for me. Oh, can't you get me in?" He tried again and gave some good advice and endeavored to comfort her by expressing the hope that all would be well if she would only seek to lead a Christian life. "That won't do!" she exclaimed. "I'm a poor sinner! I've no time to lead a Christian life. I'm dying and I want to go in. Oh, can't you tell me how I may get into heaven?"

Dr. Berry did not know what to say or how to comfort her. At last he thought, "Why not tell her what my mother used to tell me? Why not give her some of the simple texts and Gospel stories I learned as a child?"

With this in mind he began to repeat some of the precious Gospel verses telling of God's love for sinners and of the Savior who had died to redeem. The woman listened eagerly. "That's it! That ought to get me in, shouldn't it! Did he die for sinners? Then that should get me in."

Stirred to the depths of his own being he told the story of the cross as he had not preached it for years. Like a thirsty soul, she drank in the living water. Finally, he knelt and prayed with her. She trusted Christ for herself. Her fears were allayed, and she entered into peace. "Jowett," said Dr. Berry years afterward, "I helped get her in that night, and while I was helping to get her in, I got myself in also!" [6]

## **The Wonderful Benefits of Staying in the Safest Spot in the Universe**

And once into the arms of Jesus, what do you get? Turn back for a moment to Joshua 20 and note somewhere these six truths for those who flee to the safest spot in the universe. When you

get there, to Him, you find the perfect refuge has so much to offer us. Jesus can be for any and all of us this morning the perfect refuge.

Now can I read Joshua 20 again and give you the meaning of each city that God names? Here we go: *"And they [assigned] Kedesh in Galilee in Mount Naphtali, and Shechem in Mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah. And on the other side [of the] Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. These were the cities assigned for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger who sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person without intent might flee the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation."* (Joshua 20:7-9)

- KEDESH is not only a city name it also means a "holy place" or "righteousness".
- SHECHEM is not only a city name it also means "shoulder".
- HEBRON is not only a city name it also means "fellowship".
- BEZER is not only a city name it also means a "stronghold" or "fortress".
- RAMOTH is not only a city name it also means "exalted" or "heights".
- GOLAN is not only a city name it also means "separated."

Now listen to how each of those city names portray details of the refuge offered for us to lay hold of every day, every hour, and every moment of our lives.

Jesus offers to each of us to be a refuge when we are unclean, a refuge when we are weary, a refuge when we are homeless, a refuge when we are helpless, a refuge when we are hopeless, and a refuge when we are tempted.

Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the unclean; Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the weary; Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the homeless; Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the helpless; Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the hopeless; and Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the tempted.

Have you fled to the safest spot in the universe? If not do so today. If you have, look around—Christ wants to be your moment by moment perfect refuge!

[1] John MacArthur, *Saved Without A Doubt*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books) 1992.

[2] Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997.

[3] Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*, (InterVarsity Press: IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament ) Downer's Grove, IL.

[4] McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

[5] Schaeffer, Francis A., *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1985.

[6] Harry A. Ironside, @ 1940 American Tract Society, Garland, Texas

## Christ: Our Life-Long Refuge

## COR: Message Four (050626PM)

The safest spot in the universe is in the embrace of Jesus. Once into the arms of Jesus, what do you get? Turn back for a moment to Joshua 20 and note somewhere these six truths for those who flee to the safest spot in the universe. When you get there, to Him, you find the perfect refuge has so much to offer us. Jesus can be for any and all of us this morning the perfect refuge.

Jesus offers to each of us to be a refuge when we are unclean, a refuge when we are weary, a refuge when we are homeless, a refuge when we are helpless, a refuge when we are hopeless, and a refuge when we are tempted.

### The Wonderful Benefits of Staying in the Safest Spot in the Universe

Now can I read Joshua 20 again and give you the meaning of each city that God names? Here we go: *"And they [assigned] **Kedesh** in Galilee in Mount Naphtali, and **Shechem** in Mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is **Hebron**, in the mountain of Judah. And on the other side [of the] Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned **Bezer** in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and **Ramoth** in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and **Golan** in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. These were the cities assigned for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger who sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person without intent might flee the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation."* (Joshua 20:7-9)

- KEDESH is not only a city name it also means a "holy place" or "righteousness".
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Now listen to how each of those city names portray details of the refuge offered for us to lay hold of every day, every hour, and every moment of our lives.

Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the unclean; Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the weary; Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the homeless; Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the helpless; Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the hopeless; and Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the tempted.

Have you fled to the safest spot in the universe? If not do so today. If you have, look around—Christ wants to be your moment by moment perfect refuge!

Open with me to something the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come"* (1 Cor. 10:11).

"Examples" is the Greek word *tupos* or what we call in Bible study, *types*. The cities of refuge are a type of Christ. Millions of things could have been recorded, but God chose to record only

these things because they enable us to grow in our understanding of Him and our relationship to Him.

Turn with me again to Hebrews 6 as we look again at these precious words of security, comfort and hope—because there is so much MORE from God's Word for us!

*Hebrews 6:17-20 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, 18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled **for refuge** to lay hold of the hope set before us. 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, 20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*

The safest spot in the Universe that is even safer than Cheyenne Mountain is also the closest. Jesus Christ our hope, our refuge, and our salvation--is one thought away, one prayer away. He is as close as a cry, as close as an out stretched hand, or an upturned heart. Anyone, anywhere can instantly arrive in that safest of all places--from any location.

### **Christ Was Portrayed by the Cities of Refuge**

So Christ is easy to reach, His arms are open to all, His entrance is never locked, He is a completely sufficient refuge, and He is the only hope. How wonderful. But there is so much more as we examine the differences between the cities of refuge and Christ our refuge. Christ is portrayed by the cities of refuge but He is so much better!

### **But--Christ is Better Than Any City of Refuge**

There are three reasons why Jesus is better than any earthly city of refuge. They are because: He died only for the guilty which means for all of us—those cities were for only the innocent; He offers only permanent refuge—those cities were for temporary refuge; and finally He is closer than any city of refuge—it was a hard and dangerous journey for anyone trying to get to those cities.

Now, can I show you something of the depths and heights of Christ's richness toward us? Look again with me at that ancient list of city names in Joshua 20.

Do you remember from the Old Testament that often Hebrew names are also words that have a distinct meaning? And do you remember that God often points out that a name also means something in addition to being a name—to make a point?

Take for instance David's encounter with Abigail's husband Nabal. His name means in Hebrew 'fool', and God shows that is just what he was. God points out Jacob's name means deceiver as he was, and so on many times through the Old Testament this dual usage of a word is seen.

Now can I read Joshua 20 again and give you the meaning of each city that God names? Here we go: *"And they [assigned] Kedesh in Galilee in Mount Naphtali, and Shechem in Mount Ephraim,*

*and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah. And on the other side [of the] Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. These were the cities assigned for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger who sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person without intent might flee the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation." (Joshua 20:7-9)*

- KEDESH is not only a city name it also means a "holy place" or "righteousness".
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- GOLAN is not only a city name it also means "separated."

Now listen to how each of those city names portray Christ's refuge offered for us to lay hold of every day, every hour, and every moment of our lives. Jesus offers to each of us this evening to be for us a refuge when we are unclean, weary, homeless, helpless, hopeless, and tempted.

Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the unclean; Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the weary; Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the homeless; Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the helpless; Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the hopeless; and Christ is the closest, safest, and only Refuge for the tempted.

### **Christ is Also Portrayed As Our Lifelong Refuge**

In looking over the meaning of the names of these cities of refuge, we are struck with the distinctive characteristic of each. They are individually showing forth some particular feature of the character of Christ; and when taken as a whole, they illustrate the sufficiency of Christ as a Refuge to meet all of our need, and the need of all. To see the adequacy of Jesus Christ to meet our every need, consider the names of the cities. These six cities of refuge all point to Him, and enable us to sing with a restful, joyful heart, "God is our refuge and our strength." [1]

1. KEDESH means a "holy place" or "righteousness," and this is our first need. When we come to Christ, He gives us His righteousness and forgives all our sins (2 Cor 5:21, Col. 2:13). Here was the **refuge for the unclean**. The holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ is the only hope of the sinful. Only that which is clean can cleanse. The unrighteous can only find refuge in the righteousness of God. The finished work on the accursed tree affords a holy hiding-place, for only there are the unclean made holy. To that blest fountain of Thy blood, Incarnate God, I fly. There let me wash my spotted soul, From crimes of deepest dye. In wonder lost, with trembling joy We take the pardon of our God; Pardon for crimes of deepest dye, A pardon bought with Jesus' blood: Who is a pardoning God like thee? Or who has grace so rich and free?

So Jesus is the **refuge for the unclean**. There is no sin He can't forgive; there is no stain He can't remove; there is no failure He can't forget. Remember this week these words from Christ's lips:

*Mark 1:40-41 Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." 41 Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed."*

2. SHECHEM means "shoulder," and suggests that we find in Christ a resting place, a friend on whom we can lay our burdens. "Can I hold out?" is always the question a new believer asks. The answer is, "He will hold you!" Here was the ***refuge for the weary***. (Matt. 11:28; Luke 15:5) The Lord Jesus is the strong Savior. Most believers have found that they can find no rest in ruling themselves. But when faith comes, we lean not only on His merit, but also on His almightiness. A tired child finds refuge on the shoulder of its loving father. And the Lord Jesus has borne our burden upon His shoulder, even as the lost sheep found both safety and rest upon the shepherd's shoulders.

So Jesus is the ***refuge for the weary***. There is no sheep of His pasture that He doesn't invite to find rest in Him. He seeks us, finds us, and offers to us His perfect rest. Remember this week these words from Christ's lips:

*Matthew 11:28-30 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

3. HEBRON means "fellowship," suggesting our fellowship with God in Christ, and also our fellowship with other believers. You can have a house and not a home. But if you have a home you can be at home anywhere even if you have no house. Home is where you relax in the company of those you love and trust. So the Lord Jesus is the ***refuge for those who are alone and feel homeless***. Like Noah's dove, man is spiritually a homeless wanderer. There was no rest, no safety, and no fellowship outside of that ark. The repentant homeless prodigal found a refuge in his father's house and in his father's fellowship. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only real Hebron for the soul. There is no fellowship with the Father except through Him, ...truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." (I John 1:3)

So Jesus is the ***refuge for the homeless***.. Jesus promised to always be with us. He leads us through life, meets us at death, carries us to our eternal home, and is with us (Emmanuel) forever. Remember this week these words from Christ's lips:

- *Matthew 28:20b "... and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen."*

4. BEZER means "stronghold" or "fortress," suggesting the protection and victory we have in Christ. The safest place in the world is in the will of God. Jesus Christ is the ***refuge for the helpless***. We are not only sinners, but we are also helplessly sinful. In the case of the one guilty of second-degree murder, there was to be no such thing as self-protection. And so it is with us sinners. We are "without strength." "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." (Prov. 18: 10) When we flee from the justice of God into the mercy of God, we will find a stronghold that can never give way. No matter how helpless, here you are eternally safe. The Lord Jesus is the only Bezer. Any other hiding places will fail us, and fall like the walls of Jericho.

So Jesus is the **refuge for the helpless**. When we are weak He is strong; when we reach the end of all we are—He has just begun. Remember this week these words from Christ's lips:

- *Matthew 14:27-33 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." 28 And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." 29 So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. 30 But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" 31 And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."*

5. RAMOTH means "exalted" or "heights" and reminds us that believers are seated "together in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 2:4-10). Sin always leads a person down, but Christ lifts us up; and one day we shall be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air! And so our Lord is the **refuge for the hopeless**. By nature we are not only without strength, but also without hope in the world.(Eph. 2:12) Those who hope in this world system of politics and religion have no hope. The Lord Jesus is our hope, exalted at the Father's right hand, with a name which is above every name, high and lifted up. He is our Ramoth. When you are downcast, and feeling yourself hopeless in this world, look up. During Noah's flood, there was no mountain that could save. Only those who were lifted up by the ark were saved. Jesus Christ is the Ark of our hope and eternal security.

So Jesus is the **refuge for the hopeless**. When life is dark, no hope is in sight, and we don't know where to turn Jesus reminds us—when there is no answer to all our problems, there is still Jesus. Remember this week these words from Christ's lips:

- *Mark 2:3-5 Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. 4 And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."*

6. GOLAN means "separated." God has appointed His Son to be the **refuge for those who are tempted**. We are usually tempted much by the world when we tamper much with the world. We have not fled to the Lord Jesus as our city of separation. He separated Himself for our sakes-for He was separate from sinners-that He might aid those who are tempted. Golan is the last of the six cities which are mentioned. Most of us would have to confess that separation from worldly ambition, worldly pleasures, and worldly fame is just about the last refuge which we seek. *1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.*

So Jesus is the *refuge for those who are tempted*. Jesus knows our frame that we are dust. He is acquainted with all of our struggles and weaknesses. Remember this week these words from Christ's lips:

- *John 8:10-11 When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" 11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."*

(Romans 7; Psalm 32 and David; James 1:13-14)

Is Christ your city of Refuge? Is He easy for you to reach to? Are His arms open to you? Do you see His entrance as never locked, and that He is a completely sufficient refuge? Do you see that there is no other hope but Him? Then He is YOUR city of refuge.

Do you see--Christ is better because He is nearer than any city of refuge. Christ is better because He *offers only Permanent Refuge*. And, Christ is better because He *died only for the guilty*.

**Have you fled for life-long refuge to the One who is** the refuge for the unclean, the refuge for the weary; the refuge for the homeless; the refuge for the helpless, the refuge for the hopeless, and the refuge for those who are tempted.

### **Finding Refuge Through Christ's Word**

Now to apply what we have learned about Christ our forerunner (prodromos) who pulls us safely home; and Christ our city of refuge—let me show you how to find refuge each day in the Bible!

Go back and look again at Hebrews 6:18-19 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the **hope** set before us. 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil,

The third Hebrew word that God gives us is describing **CLINGING HOPE**--the word is **BATACH** (982): **HOPE THAT INSPIRES DEEPER TRUST**.

**What does God seek as our response to hard times? Clinging to Him as our refuge--is the resounding answer.**

Turn with me to the most well known verse in the Bible using this special word. Proverbs 3:5. **Trust** [literally cling to; Hebrew *batach*; LXX *peitho*] the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;

Here *batach* is used in the sense of hope that comes from casting one's total future upon God as a little child and trusting Him for everything. This word is most often translated to trust or to have confidence in someone-usually God. But in some contexts it is definitely used to mean hope, as

in the great prophetic Twenty-second Psalm. The Messiah's thoughts while suffering on the cross are predicted here[2]:

"But thou [God] art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me HOPE [Hebrew *batach*; LXX *elpis*] when I was upon my mother's breasts" (Psalms 22:9 KJV).

- Psalm 37:3-5 **Trust in** [LXX *elpidzo*] the Lord, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. 4 Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. 5 Commit your way to the Lord, **Trust** also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.
- Psalm 40:3 He has put a new song in my mouth—Praise to our God; Many will see it and fear, **And will trust** [cling to] the Lord.
- Psalm 56:3-4, 11 Whenever I am afraid, **I will trust** [cling to] You. 4 In God (I will praise His word), In God I **have put my trust**; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me. 11 In God **I have put my trust**; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?
- Psalm 112:7 He will not be afraid of evil tidings; His heart is steadfast, **trusting** [clinging to] the Lord.

Old Testament *batach* is in the LXX the New Testament *elpis*/*elpidzo*. New Testament usage of *elpidzo*:

- 2 Corinthians 1:10 who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we **trust** that He will still deliver us,
- Philippians 2:19 But I **trust** in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state.
- 1 Timothy 4:10 For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we **trust** in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.
- 1 Timothy 5:5 Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, **trusts** in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.
- 1 Timothy 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to **trust** in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.
- Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things **hoped** for, the evidence of things not seen.
- 1 Peter 1:13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your **hope** fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;
- 1 Peter 3:5 For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who **trusted** in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands,

New Testament usage of *elpis*:

- Romans 5:2, 4-5 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in **hope** of the glory of God. 4 and perseverance, character; and character, **hope**. 5 Now **hope** does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.
- Romans 15:4, 13 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have **hope**. 13 Now may

the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in **hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit.

- Colossians 1:5 because of the **hope** which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel,
- Titus 2:13 looking for the blessed **hope** and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,
- 1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living **hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
- 1 Peter 1:21 who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and **hope** are in God.
- 1 Peter 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the **hope** that is in you, with meekness and fear;
- 1 John 3:3 And everyone who has this **hope** in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

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[1] Roy Gustafson, *In His Land Seeing Is Believing*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: World Wide Publications, 1980, p. 65-68.

[2] Hal Lindsey, *The Terminal Generation*. Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company: 1976, p. 95.

**Christ: Refuge for the Unclean**  
**COR: Message Five (050703AM)**

For centuries an archaic Old Testament system of justice laid in the dust of the past. Then Jesus stepped onto the planet. The One who was promised arrived, and the True Refuge that these temporal, insufficient refuges has heralded was visible and available.

In the Old Testament a fearful fleeing Jew would be directed towards the nearest of the six cities of refuge. As the city was pointed at, a name would be spoken to that one seeking protection. All the cities afforded equal protection—just the names differed.

In looking over the meaning of the names of these cities of refuge, we see a distinct characteristic of Christ in each one. When taken as a whole, they illustrate the sufficiency of Christ as a Refuge to meet all of our need, and the need of all. To see the adequacy of Jesus Christ to meet our every need, consider the names of the cities. They are Kedesh in Galilee in mount Naphtali, Shechem in mount Ephraim, Kirjatharba which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah, Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of manasseh.

Over the next month we are going to stop and visit Christ in each of these ways the Old Testament has promised Him as our perfect refuge. As we do so we find that is how the New Testament presents Him.

Here is the pathway of the next six messages we will share from God's Word:

- Today we will see that Christ is our 'holy place' and our 'righteousness'. He is the only Refuge for all of us when we feel unclean, defiled or guilty;
- Tonight we will learn that Christ is our safe and strong 'shoulder'. He is the only Refuge for all of us when we feel weary, exhausted or stressed;
- Next time we will see that Christ is our 'fellowship'. He is the only Refuge for the lonely who feel left out, left behind, homeless and forsaken;
- Christ is our 'stronghold' or 'fortress'. He is the only Refuge for all of us when we feel helpless, fearful, and powerless;
- Christ is 'exalted' and He is in the 'heights'. He is the only Refuge for us when our hearts darken and we feel hopeless;
- Christ is 'separated' and holy, made higher than the Heavens. He is the only Refuge for all of us when we struggle, and feel so weak when we are tempted.

Turn with me again to Hebrews 6 as we look again at these precious words of security, comfort and hope—because there is so much MORE from God's Word for us!

- Hebrews 6:18b ... *we might have strong consolation, who have fled **for refuge** to lay hold of the hope set before us.*

Today if in your sin you are fleeing—flee to Jesus, the safest and nearest refuge for the unclean.

If you fear your past, hate your sin, long to have some deep dark stain removed, some painful memory healed, some horrible guilt forever banished—Jesus has His gates open wide. His Door is unlocked and He stands with open arms to believers and unbelievers alike this very moment.

## The Wonderful Benefit of Staying in the Safest Spot in the universe is finding Christ as our Lifelong Refuge

KEDESH means a "holy place" or "righteousness," and this is our first need. When we come to Christ, He gives us His righteousness and forgives all our sins (2 Cor 5:21, Col. 2:13).

So Jesus is the *refuge for the unclean*. There is no sin He can't forgive; there is no stain He can't remove; there is no failure He can't forget. Remember this week these words from Christ's lips:

- Mark 1:40-45 *Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." 41 Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." 42 As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. 43 And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once, 44 and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." 45 However, he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction.*

This is Christ's first meeting with an individual in Mark's Gospel. All other events have been with groups. This meeting is captured because it is the most beautiful reminder of how Jesus cleanses us completely as individuals. This morning we see Jesus as the perfect refuge for this unclean leper.

Physically, leprosy is awful. Leprosy was the scourge of the ancient world. Nothing evoked more fear, more dread, or more revulsion than the sight of these walking dead. That is what a leper was called, a walking dead man. The smell of his decaying flesh would announce his coming long before the tattered scraps of his clothing would be seen, or his raspy "Unclean! Unclean!" announcement he was required to declare, could be heard. The stumbling shuffle of toeless feet, the wandering of sightless eyes and the moan of a cheekless mouth, all pointed to leprosy; this unseen attacker that slowly destroyed human bodies, and made the individual an untouchable to society. [1]

Spiritually, leprosy is a vivid and graphic picture of the horrible power of sin. Sin is ugly, loathsome, incurable, and contaminating; it separates men from God and makes them outcasts. The instructions given to the priests in Leviticus 13 help us understand the nature of sin:

1. Sin is inside us, deeper than the skin (Lev. 13:3) and cannot be helped by mere "surface" measures (see Jer. 6:14);
2. Sin also spreads just like leprosy (Lev. 13:8);
3. Sin always defiles (Lev. 13:45-46). People with leprosy were looked on as "dead" (Num. 12:12).
4. Because of his defilement, a leprous person had to be isolated outside the camp (Lev. 13:46) so lost sinners one day will be isolated in hell;

5. And just as leprous garments are fit only for the fire (Lev. 13:52, 57), so those who die clothed in sin will burn forever. How important it is for lost sinners to trust Jesus Christ and get rid of their “leprosy”![2]

The steps in the leper’s cleansing and restoration (in Leviticus 14) picture to us what Jesus Christ has done for sinners. Please turn there with me.

**The Priest had to seek out the leper (v. 3). *Jesus seeks the Lost.***

- Leviticus 14:3 *And the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall examine him; and indeed, if the leprosy is healed in the leper,*

Of course, the leper was barred from coming into the camp, so the priest had to go “outside the camp” to him. What a picture of Christ who came to us and died “outside the camp” that we might be saved (Heb. 13:10–13). We did not seek Him; He came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). In the case of the Jewish leper, the priest went out to investigate and determine if indeed the victim was healed; but Jesus comes to us that He might heal us of the sickness of sin.

**The Leper needed a Substitute to take away His uncleanness (vv. 4–7a).  
*Jesus died for sinners.***

- Leviticus 14:4-7a *then the priest shall command to take for him who is to be cleansed two living and clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop. 5 And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water. 6 As for the living bird, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the scarlet and the hyssop, and dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water. 7 And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed from the leprosy,*

This ceremony is a beautiful picture of the work of Christ. The priest took one of the birds and placed it in an earthen vessel (clay jar), and then he killed it. Christ willingly left heaven and took upon Himself a body, put Himself, as it were, in an earthen vessel, that He might die for us. The priest then took the living bird, dipped it in the blood of the dead bird, and set it free. Here is a vivid illustration of Christ’s resurrection. Christ died for our sins and was raised again, and He took the blood (spiritually speaking) back to heaven that we might be cleansed from sin. The priest finally sprinkled some of the blood on the leper, for “without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22, nkjv).

**The Leper had to Believe the Word (v. 7b). *Jesus asks us to come.***

- Leviticus 14:7b *and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose in the open field.*

After years of exclusion and separation because of his uncleanness, the priest told the leper he was clean. Even if he didn't feel clean, he had to respond by faith. How did the victim know he was clean? The priest told him so! How do believers today know that God has saved us? He tells

us so in His Word! No matter how the leper felt or what he looked like, God said he was clean, and that settled it. Listen to Christ's words, let them sink into your soul:

- Mark 2:5 When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.”
- Luke 7:47 Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.”
- John 8:11 She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.”
- John 8:32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

**The Leper had to respond with OBEDIENCE (v. 8-9). *Jesus cleanses completely.***

- Leviticus 14:8-9 *He who is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, shave off all his hair, and wash himself in water, that he may be clean. After that he shall come into the camp, and shall stay outside his tent seven days. 9 But on the seventh day he shall shave all the hair off his head and his beard and his eyebrows—all his hair he shall shave off. He shall wash his clothes and wash his body in water, and he shall be clean.*

This washing is a picture of the believer cleansing himself from filthiness of the flesh and spirit (2 Cor. 7:1). After we have been saved, it is our responsibility to keep our lives blameless and holy for His sake. Perhaps Paul had Leviticus 14 in mind when he compared the new life in Christ to a change of clothes (Col. 3:1–14).

**The Leper is given Consecration to Newness of Life (vv. 10, 14–17). *Jesus offers us beginning once and for all and every new day!***

- Leviticus 14:10, 14-17 *“And on the eighth day he shall take two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish, three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, and one log of oil. 14 The priest shall take some of the blood of the trespass offering, and the priest shall put it on the tip of the right ear [a picture of hearing God's Word] of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand [a picture of doing God's Work], and on the big toe of his right foot [a picture of walking God's Way]. 15 And the priest shall take some of the log of oil, and pour it into the palm of his own left hand [note that the oil (emblem of the Holy Spirit) comes after the blood (emblem of salvation)]. 16 Then the priest shall dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand, and shall sprinkle some of the oil with his finger seven times before the Lord. 17 And of the rest of the oil in his hand, the priest shall put some on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot, on the blood of the trespass offering.*

It's now the eighth day since the priest first visited the leper, and eight is the number of the new beginning. This is a touching part of the ritual. The priest took the blood and applied it to the right ear, the right thumb, and the right great toe of the man, symbolizing that his whole body had now been purchased and belonged to God. He was to listen to God's Word, work for God's

glory, and walk in God's ways. Then the priest put the oil on the blood, symbolizing the power of the Spirit of God for the doing of God's will.

The blood could not be put on the oil; the oil had to be put on the blood. For where the blood has been applied, the Spirit of God can work. The rest of the oil was poured on the man's head, and thus, he was anointed for his new life. If you will read Lev. 8:22–24, you will see that a similar ceremony was performed for the consecration of the priests. In other words, God treated the leper as he would a priest.

Back to Mark one, and note the incredible details of Christ's cleansing of this man.

The lepers, or the walking dead, were so feared that they were driven to live outside of civilization. No family would be allowed to stay in touch with their loved one once that oozing, green sore was detected. With pitiful wails like a funeral, the dirge of the farewell to the precious husband, father, son, daughter, mother, grandfather, or grand mother would swell from the tear filled faces of the ones never to see their loved one again. Off went the walking dead leper to the dark, pain-filled world of exclusion, hatred, bitterness, and loneliness. Marked for life as a communicable bearer of the most dreaded, incurable blights ever known. Doomed to be treated like an enemy for the rest of your life. Welcome to the Leper's World, the World of the Walking dead.

But then came Jesus. Mark used his favorite word in our passage we will read this morning. When the untouchable is touched by Jesus, note (v. 42), "*Immediately* the leprosy left him and he was cured."

### **Coming by Seeking**

"The sinner is in a plight more miserable than the leper; let him imitate his example and go to Jesus, "beseeching him and kneeling down to him." Let him exercise what little faith he has, even though it should go no further than "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean"; and there need be no doubt as to the result of the application.

Jesus heals all who come, and casts out none.

Jesus touched the leper. This unclean person had broken through the regulations of the ceremonial law and pressed into the house, but Jesus so far from chiding him broke through the law himself in order to meet him. He made an interchange with the leper, for while he cleansed him, he contracted by that touch a Levitical defilement. Even so Jesus Christ was made sin for us, although in himself he knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

That hand which multiplied the loaves, which saved sinking Peter, which upholds afflicted saints, which crowns believers, that same hand will touch every seeking sinner, and in a moment make him clean. The love of Jesus is the source of salvation. He loves, he looks, he touches us, we live." [3]

This man knew that Jesus was *able* to heal him, but he was not sure the Master was *willing* to heal him. Lost sinners today have the same unnecessary concern, for God has made it abundantly clear that He is not willing that sinners perish (2 Peter 3:9) and that He is willing that all men be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). Anyone who has never trusted the Savior is spiritually in worse shape than this man was physically.

When Jesus touched the leper, He contracted the leper's defilement; *but He also conveyed His health!* Is this not what He did for us on the cross when He was made sin for us? (2 Cor. 5:21) The leper did not question His *ability* to heal; he only wondered if He were willing. Certainly God is willing to save! He is "God our Savior, who will have all men to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:3–4). God is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9).

With that touch Jesus answered for all time the doubts of those who wonder if God really cares. Jesus not only met the physical need. He understood the loneliness this man must have experienced, and with His touch dealt directly with that inner pain. If you've ever been lonely, ever felt rejected or unloved, you know what that touch must have meant. Jesus' touch was not needed to heal the leprosy, but it was necessary to meet this man's deep, inner need for love. Jesus touched him. As He yearns to touch all.

The reason we are studying this passage today is to see what Jesus Christ can do for you, for anyone in an instant, in a split second of belief. The healing of Christ in salvation from sin is *instantaneous* and *complete* ("the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin.")

Imagine<sup>[4]</sup> what happened to that leper who was touched by Jesus. His feet—*toeless, ulcerated stubs*—were suddenly whole, bursting his shrunken sandals.

The knobs on his hands grew fingers before his very eyes. Back came his hair, eyebrows, eyelashes. Under his hair were ears and before him a nose! His skin was supple and soft.

Can you hear a thundering roar from the multitude? Can you hear the man crying *not*, "Unclean! Unclean!," but, "*I'm clean! I'm clean!*"

*Shackled by a heavy burden, neath a load of guilt and shame,*

*Then the hand of Jesus touched me, and now I am no longer the same.*

*He touched me, Oh He touched me, and Oh the joy that floods my souls,*

*Something happened and now I know, He touched me and made me whole!*

Today if in your sin you are fleeing—flee to Jesus, the safest and nearest refuge for the unclean.

To rest any troubled minds who may fear that they have somehow committed this sin which can never be forgiven – on the basis of Christ's words in Mark 3.28. Rest your finger there on those words, allow your eyes to follow along – hear the voice of Jesus speaking. Let Him assure you this morning!

- The unpardonable sin is not taking God the Father, God the Son or even God the Holy Spirit's Name in vain. **“Assuredly I say to you – all sins will be forgiven...”**
- The unpardonable sin is not any form of sexual sin – no matter how vile – not adultery, not perversion. **“Assuredly I say to you – all sins will be forgiven...”**
- The unpardonable sin is not any form of murder, even the most heinous forms. **“Assuredly I say to you – all sins will be forgiven...”**

Jesus always offered only one way out of sin. Sorrowful admission of guilt, and humble requests for mercy. Confession and forgiveness. Belief and repentance.

If you realize that the leprosy of sin has infected your person, then you have no doubt that you are a sinner. If you believe that, there is no reason why you should not go immediately to Him. He has compassion, He will actually *touch* the leprosy of your sin, and you will be immediately healed! Have you humbled yourself to say, “I know You are willing, make me clean”? If not yet, then why not this morning, why not do it now?

If you fear your past, hate your sin, long to have some deep dark stain removed, some painful memory healed, some horrible guilt forever banished—Jesus has His gates open wide. His Door is unlocked and He stands with open arms to believers and unbelievers alike this very moment.

There is a relevant application to all this. We will never affect others as Christ did unless there is contact and identification. We have to be willing to take the hand of those whom we would help. Sometimes a touch, caring involvement, will do a thousand times more than our theology. This is what all churches need to do. We are great in theory. We are careful about our doctrine.

But we need to lay our hand on some rotting flesh in our neighborhood, in the executive towers where we work, in the city slums. We cannot expect this to be only the job of missionaries because a church which does not regularly place its hand on the rotting humanity around it will not be sending missionaries to do so either.

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[1] Drawn from the Mark series message 17 preached on 00611AM.

[2] Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

[3] Spurgeon, Charles H., *Morning and Evening*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995.

[4] Drawn from Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Mark—Jesus, Servant and Savior*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

# Christ: Refuge for the Weary

## COR: Message Six (050703PM)

If anyone should have been stressed out and weary it was Jesus. He lived the perfect human life, yet--He lived in a whirlwind of activity. He was constantly eating, walking, talking, and sleeping with twelve men who never seemed to leave Him alone. Vast crowds and desperate individuals sought him out. He was chided, rebuked, and even scoffed at by His own family.

He was the personal target of Satan, who tempted Him, tried to derail Him, and entered people to drive them to destroy Him. He was attacked by every demon that could be rounded up to scream at Him, thrash around in front of Him, and seek to bother Him.

Civil and religious authorities, always plotting to catch Him and take Him off for punishment and execution, hounded him. His life was so full of people and ministry that he often didn't even have a moment to stop to eat. Yet, in the midst of all that, Jesus was peaceful, calm, focused, and confidently following God's will. How did He do that?

If we follow Him, we can find His secret. Though we can never be sinless, we can learn and follow His pattern for the perfect life in step with God's will. Although Jesus lived an extremely full, busy, and demanding life, every time He is seen in the Scriptures, He is quiet, composed, and led by the Spirit.

Jesus was God, yet He lived the perfect human life as a man. What kept that perfect life on earth so strong? What was His secret? Time alone with God that rested His soul. He stopped everything else and rested in God.

You can revitalize your walk in this world by starting or restarting a habit of cultivating rest for your soul—time in the Word and time in prayer. The songwriter of Hymn #497 captures this solitude in secret with God:

There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God, a place where sin cannot molest, near to the heart of God.

There is a place of comfort sweet, near to the heart of God, a place where we our Savior meet, near to the heart of God.

There is a place of full release, near to the heart of God, a place where all is joy and peace, near to the heart of God.

Chorus: O Jesus, blest Redeemer, sent from the heart of God, hold us who wait before Thee near to the heart of God.[1]

Jesus had cultivated the discipline of resting in His Father by getting alone with Him. He had learned the secret of waiting on God. His life shows us that intimate communion with God is needed to live a godly life full of power, under the control of God's Spirit. He calls each of us to

do the same. We must learn to seek and find a solitary place in our life to get alone with God regularly.

Rest for our souls is the great necessity of our spiritual lives. We need to be alone with God daily. We need to find times to get away alone. We need to get up early if necessary. Few of us are called to spend many hours in daily prayer, but *all* of us must spend *some* time. If it is impossible when the family is awake, pray before they get up. If you have no place you can do this at home, find a place to park your car on the way to work and pray in the anonymity of the passing traffic.

Over the next month we are going to stop and visit Christ in each of these ways the Old Testament has promised Him. As we do so we find that is how the New Testament presents Him.

Here is the pathway of the messages we will share from God's Word:

- This morning we saw that Christ is our "holy place" and our "righteousness." He is the only Refuge for all of us when we feel unclean, defiled or guilty;
- Tonight we will learn that Christ is our safe and strong "shoulder". He is the only Refuge for all of us when we feel weary, exhausted or stressed;
- Next time we will see that Christ is our "fellowship". He is the only Refuge for the lonely who feel left out, left behind, homeless and forsaken;
- Christ is our "stronghold" or "fortress." He is the only Refuge for all of us when we feel helpless, fearful, and powerless;
- Christ is "exalted" and He is in the "heights." He is the only Refuge for us when our hearts darken and we feel hopeless;
- Christ is "separated" and holy, made higher than the Heavens. He is the only Refuge for all of us when we struggle, and feel so weak when we are tempted.

### **Finding Christ as a Lifelong Refuge for the Weary**

SHECHEM means "shoulder," and suggests that we find in Christ a resting place, a friend on whom we can lay our burdens. Can I hold out? is always the question a new believer asks. The answer is, He will hold you! The Lord Jesus is our strong Savior. Most believers have found that they can find no rest trying to live life their way instead of God's.

So Jesus is the *refuge for the weary*. There is no sheep of His pasture that He doesn't invite to find rest in Him. He seeks us, finds us, and offers to us His perfect rest. Remember this week these words from Christ's lips:

- Matthew 11:28-30 *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*

For a moment do a weariness study of life around us and see if we are weary. First, we are weary because of the **change and stress** which derail us from seeking God's Promised rest.

- Isaiah 30:15 *For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.” But you would not,*

Although people will pay to fix their stress, they are not about to change the lifestyle that is causing it. - David C. Mc Casland

The only trouble with success is that the formula for achieving it is the same as the formula for a nervous breakdown. – Chuck Swindoll

Stress may be the spice of life or the kiss of death. – Robert Elliot, M.D., Cardiologist

Writer Robert Kanigel understands change and stress. “Here’s the problem: While choices multiply, we stay pretty much the same. Our bodies and minds remain the bottleneck through which choice must pass. We still have the same brains our forebears did, still only twenty-four hours a day to use them. We still need time and energy to listen, look, absorb, distinguish, and decide. The opportunity to choose among many options is, of course, a good thing. But maybe you can have too much of a good thing? Even of choice itself? Each choice saps energy, takes time, makes a big deal out of what isn’t.[2]

Secondly, we are weary because of the **ceaseless pressures of debt**[3] that rob our taking advantage of God's Promised rest.

- Isaiah 48:18 *Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea.*

Another reason we need to cease all and rest weekly is that it keeps us aware of the debt frenzy all around us.

- We will loan you enough money to get you completely out of debt. – sign in a loan office
- More than a billion people around the world live on less than a dollar a day. – Ron Sider
- Interest works night and day, in fair weather and in foul. It gnaws at a man’s substance with invisible teeth. – Henry Ward Beecher
- Today, our lives are addictively intertwined in the economic system, and the credit-debt mentality has been fully normalized. “Someone has described a modern American as a person: who drives a credit union-financed car over a bond-financed highway on credit card gas to open a charge account at a department store so he can fill his bank financed home with installment-purchased furniture.”[4]

Thirdly, we are weary because the **hurry and rush** surrounding us always displaces God's time for us to rest.

- Isaiah 58:13-14 *“If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, From doing your pleasure on My holy day, And call the Sabbath a delight, The holy day of the Lord honorable, And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, Nor finding your own pleasure, Nor speaking your own words, 14 Then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken.”*

“America, the land of the rushed,” complains small town journalist Peg Zaemisch. “We have proudly defined our American lifestyle as ‘life in the fast lane.’ Now, we rush to construct passing lanes, so we can get around those pokie-schmokies in the fast lane...do they think we’ve got all day? We’ve become a country of out-of-breath-red-faced folks, racing around with our hair permanently blowing back.” Zaemisch vows to tame her “catch-a-bullet-in-my-teeth schedule –just as soon as I get off this deadline.”[5]

Even our sentences are peppered with such words as *time crunch, fast food, rush hour, frequent flyer, expressway, overnight delivery, and rapid transit*. The products and services we use further attest to our hurry: We pull in our speeding cars for gas and snacks at **Quick Trip**, send packages overnight by **Federal Express**, talk while we do other things on a cell phone service called **Sprint**, manage our personal finances on **Quicken**, schedule our appointments on a **DayRunner**, diet with **SlimFast**, and even buy swimming gear made by **Speedo**.

Speed. Hurry. We pay a price for the pace at which we live. “No one knows where we are going, the aim of life has been forgotten, the end has been left behind. Man has set out at tremendous speed – to go *nowhere*.”[6]

"Yes, the world[7] is going faster. And yes, we in turn are also going faster. But the important question no one asks is this: When does faster become too fast? Is there a speed limit to life? What happens when we exceed it? Does God give us a ticket? I have thought long and hard about the issue of speed and have come to believe that it is as much responsible for the problem of personal and societal dysfunction as any other single factor. Virtually all of our relationships are damaged by hurry. Many families are being starved to death by velocity. Our children lie wounded on the ground, run over by our high-speed good intentions." [8]

So Jesus is the *refuge for the weary*. There is no sheep of His pasture that He doesn't invite to find rest in Him. He seeks us, finds us, and offers to us His perfect rest. Remember this week these words from Christ's lips:

- Matthew 11:28-30 *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”*

**Respond to Christ.** There are three imperatives in two verses.

- Matthew 11:28-30 **Come** to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 **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. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”*

This is not an invitation to a party to sip and sample something. Jesus said I AM THE ANSWER, COME TO ME. This is salvation. Rest for the weary starts with salvation. The lost [and disobedient believers] have no rest in their sin. Restlessness is their lifestyle.

- Isaiah 57:20-21 *But the wicked are like the troubled sea, When it cannot rest, Whose waters cast up mire and dirt. 21 “There is no peace,” Says my God, “for the wicked.”*

In God's Word listening to Christ, is listening to the Holy Spirit, is obeying the Word of God. Jesus called for us to completely turn unto Him as the way to live life. But Jesus says more, look at the second half of v. 28:

- Matthew 11:28-30 *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

This sounds so beautiful in the word for word rendering of the Greek. Here is each word in order of the text: ***Come toward Me all the ones laboring and the ones having been packed, and I will rest you.***

This calls for us to admit that something is wrong. We have to acknowledge our need. Jesus calls for those who are overloaded, and as the verse literally says “all the ones laboring and the ones having been packed”.

Is life a labor? Do you feel packed in, piled so high you can't take another step? Then He says you need to listen to Me.

One very gifted writer has expressed modern society's problem as OVERLOAD. Let me explain what he meant. Think with me where you show up on a diagnostic test that detects this deadly condition called overload. Do you have any of these symptoms?

*WE ALLOW OUR LIVES TO HAVE ACTIVITY OVERLOAD* - we book our lives weeks into the future and often in the desire to be more efficient we book several things into the same time period. “Activity overload takes away the pleasure of anticipation and the delight of reminiscence.” ***But God says stop, hold still so you can know Me.***

- Psalm 46:10 *Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!*
- Psalm 46:10 ***“Stand silent! Know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation in the world!”*** (The Living Bible)

*WE ALLOW OUR LIVES TO HAVE CHANGE OVERLOAD* - “nothing defines our age more than the furious and relentless increase in the rate of change,” summarizes historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. For thousands of years of recorded history change came in a slow, controlled and

understandable rate, now we are brutally jerked forward at warp speed whether we like it or not. ***But God says seek out the old paths where you find rest for your soul.***

- Jeremiah 6:16 *Thus says the Lord: "Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'*

***WE ALLOW OUR LIVES TO HAVE COMMITMENT OVERLOAD*** - Most of us make more commitments than we have time to give them. In his great book ***Balancing Life's Demands*** Dr. J. Grant Howard says, "Some people can't say no. They take on too many relationships and too many responsibilities. They enroll in too many courses, hold down too many jobs, volunteer for too many tasks, make too many appointments, serve on too many committees, have too many friends. They are trying to be all things to all men all at once all by themselves!"[9] ***But God says seek Me most, seek me with all your heart.***

- Psalm 27:4 ***One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.***

***WE ALLOW OUR LIVES TO HAVE CHOICE OVERLOAD*** - In the seventies there were 11,767 items in the average supermarket; in the 1990's the number rose to over 24,000. Today that number is near 30,000. This includes over 186 different choices of breakfast cereal you can find at your grocery store. A satellite dish can serve you up 1,500 movie choices per month. Futurist Allan Toffler warns, "We are in fact, racing toward 'over-choice' ". ***God says choose whom and what we will serve with all our hearts.***

- Joshua 24:15 *And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*
- James 1:8 *he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

***WE ALLOW OUR LIVES TO HAVE COMPETITION OVERLOAD*** - it's part of the American dream. To compete is American and it's constantly emphasized in school, business and athletics...but is it spiritually healthy? ***Jesus taught a non-aggressive, non-self asserting, non-self promoting lifestyle for His children in the Sermon on the Mount...***

- Matthew 5:1-8 *And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. 2 Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: 3 "Blessed are **the poor in spirit**, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are **those who mourn**, For they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are **the meek**, For they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who **hunger and thirst for righteousness**, For they shall be filled. 7 Blessed are **the merciful**, For they shall obtain mercy. 8 Blessed are **the pure in heart**, For they shall see God.*

What different counsel we get from man! J. B. Phillips illustrates this when he alters the Beatitudes to read as follows:

1. Happy are the “pushers”: for they get on in the world.
2. Happy are the hard-boiled: for they never let life hurt them.
3. Happy are they who complain: for they get their own way in the end.
4. Happy are the blasé: for they never worry over their sins.
5. Happy are the slave drivers: for they get results.
6. Happy are the knowledgeable men of the world: for they know their way around.
7. Happy are the troublemakers: for they make people take notice of them.

*WE ALLOW OUR LIVES TO HAVE DEBT OVERLOAD* - from the White House to the bungalow on your street most of America is awash in red ink. It is debilitating and unbiblical! **God says not to steal, not to hold on to another's possessions more than love would allow.**

- Romans 13:8 *Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.*

Does “Owe no man anything” refer primarily to the Christian’s financial practices? Some people believe that it does, and that it is a sin to have a debt. J. Hudson Taylor, the godly missionary to China, would never incur a debt, basing his conviction on this verse. Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher, had the same conviction. However, the Bible does not forbid borrowing or legal financial transactions that involve interest. What the Bible does forbid is the charging of high interest, robbing the brethren, and failing to pay honest debts (see Ex. 22:25–27; Neh. 5:1–11). Matthew 25:27 and Luke 19:23 indicate that banking and investing for gain are not wrong. Certainly no one should get into unnecessary debt, or sign contracts he cannot maintain. “Thou shalt not steal.” But to make Romans 13:8 apply to all kinds of legal obligations involving money is, to me, stretching a point[10].

The point of money is that we are not to be in bondage to wanting more and more. If we can’t pay for something we should be very careful about getting it anyway because we think we need or deserve it.

*WE ALLOW OUR LIVES TO HAVE DECISION OVERLOAD* - “every day we have more tough decisions to make and less time to do it in. The trivial ones are objectionable just because of how many there are [what flavor, which topping, mint or tartar control, low fat, low sodium, diet or regular...] But we also are facing new choices generations past never dreamed of: whether or not to wait to have children; whether to move and change jobs; whether both dad *and* mom should work outside the home; whether we should put grandma in the home or not. Too many decisions trivial or not in too short a time is vintage overload.” **God says bring each decision in life to Me, wait for Me to lead, don’t be in a hurry and just go on through life your own way and miss My blessing, and My leading.**

- Proverbs 3:5-6 *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.*

*WE ALLOW OUR LIVES TO HAVE HURRY OVERLOAD* - “haste is a modern ailment. It is also fashionably American. Our lives are nonstop, lived at a breathless pace. We walk fast, talk fast, eat fast and then excuse our selves by saying, ‘I must run.’” Alexander Solzhenitsyn accusingly said, “Hastiness and superficiality - these are the psychic diseases of the 20th century”. **God says wait patiently for Me, don’t run ahead, don’t lag behind. Walk in step with my Spirit.**

- Psalm 37:7-9 *Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. 8 Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret—it only causes harm. 9 For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the Lord, They shall inherit the earth.*
- Galatians 5:16, 24 *I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 24 And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

*WE ALLOW OUR LIVES TO HAVE MEDIA OVERLOAD* - a single edition of the NY Times has more information than a seventeenth century Britisher would have encountered in a lifetime... How well do you know God? How much depth is there in your personal relationship with Him? Do you know His Word as well as you know your favorite hobby or sport for instance? That is the danger of information overload—our minds are full of so much that does not matter to God, eternity and what will last forever. But even more than reading are the power of TV, movies and games. 99% of Americans have TV in their homes; the average US home has 2 and both are on 7 hours a day...Distraction robs us of depth. It neutralizes the benefits of meditation and it encourages restlessness. **God says that to know Me we must guard our hearts.**

- Isaiah 33:14b-17 *“Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” 15 He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly [truthfulness], He who despises the gain of oppressions [compassionate], Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes [honest], Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed [non-violent], And shuts his eyes from seeing evil [consecrated]: 16 He will dwell on high; His place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; Bread will be given him, His water will be sure. 17 Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; They will see the land that is very far off.*

*POSSESSION OVERLOAD* - We have more ‘things per person ‘ than any other nation in history. Closets are full, storage space is used up, and cars can’t fit into garages. Having first imprisoned us with debt, possessions then take over our houses and occupy our time. This begins to sound like an invasion. Everything I own owns me. Why would I want more? [11] **Jesus said beware of having so much in life that the care of things makes your heart grow cold...**

- Matthew 6:19-21 *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*
- Matthew 13:22 *Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.*

- Luke 12:21 *“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”*
- 1 Timothy 6:8-10 *And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*
- Hebrews 13:5 *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”*

### ***SUBMIT to Christ’s rule; Jesus commands us to***

- Matthew 11:28-30 *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 **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. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”*

“Take my yoke”. Yoke is the universal sign of submission. The Bible begins and ends with the call to submit to Christ. Look with me at the opening words of God to Adam and Eve in Genesis. They are to obey Him or face the consequences and that is how Revelation ends—with those who rebel facing God’s endless wrath forever.

Does SUBMITTING to Him take that place in my life? Have we given obedience to God the highest place in our lives, as the inspiration for every action and motivation? If we yield to the searching of the Holy Spirit, we may find we have never given to Him the place of our total submission, or that we have some how over time taken it back. Let us unite in prayer that the Spirit may show us:

1. How defective the Christian life is where obedience doesn’t rule all;
  2. How that life can be exchanged for one of full surrender to absolute obedience;
  3. And how sure it is that God in Christ will enable us to live it out![12]
- Romans 12:9 *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; **cling to** what is good. (NIV) 2853 kollao from kolla (“glue”); join (one’s) self 4, cleave 3, be joined 2, keep company 1, vr reach 1; 11 1) to glue, to glue together, cement, fasten together 2) to join or fasten firmly together 3) to join one’s self to, cleave to*

### **Become Christ's Life long Disciple**

- Matthew 11:28-30 *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 **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. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”*

HOLD on to Him: “and learn of Me...” Surround yourself with His true Word. Meekness toward God is that disposition of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting. In the Old Testament, the meek are those wholly relying on God

rather than their own strength to defend them against injustice. Thus, meekness toward evil people means knowing God is permitting the injuries they inflict, that He is using them to purify His elect, and that He will deliver His elect in His time. (Is. 41:17, Lu. 18:1-8)

Gentleness or meekness is the opposite to self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God's goodness and control over the situation. The gentle person is not occupied with self at all. This is a work of the Holy Spirit, not of the human will. (Gal. 5:23);

Enjoy Christ's Promised Refuge for the Weary.

- *Matthew 11:28-30 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*”

**His purpose in life was DOING THE WILL OF GOD!** Hebrews 10:7 "Then I said, 'Behold, I have come In the roll of the book it is written of Me To do Thy will, O God.'" (NASB); **Do we want God's will more than our plans?**

**His delight in life was DOING THE WILL OF GOD!** John 4:34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work. (NASB) *Are the things of earth more delightful than the Truth of God?*

**His patience in life was knowing and DOING THE WILL OF GOD!** Psalm 40:6 Sacrifice and meal offering Thou hast not desired; My ears Thou hast opened; Burnt offering and sin offering Thou hast not required. (NASB) *Are you patient enough to let God choose what is best? Remember God gives the very best to those who leave the choice to Him!*

**His priority in life was DOING THE WILL OF GOD as even unto DEATH.** John 6:38 "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (NASB) **Are you dieing daily to be alive in the Spirit unto Christ?**

**His attitude of life was DOING THE WILL OF GOD in humble faith.** Luke 22:42 saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." **Are we ever whispering, "Not my will but Thine be done"?**

So Jesus is the *refuge for the weary*. There is no sheep of His pasture that He doesn't invite to find rest in Him. He seeks us, finds us, and offers to us His perfect rest. Remember this week these words from Christ's lips:

- *Matthew 11:28-30 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*”

As the world around us accelerates, our energies wane. But we are not defenseless victims. The following suggestions will help replace frenzy with peace and rest. Fleeing to Jesus as our Refuge from weariness: *Helps us Find Stillness as we bow before God* –“Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10 NIV). Before hurrying past that profound command, let’s turn it over in our minds several times.

The scene is one of stillness and quietness, listening and waiting before Him. Such foreign experiences in these busy times! Nevertheless, knowing God deeply and intimately requires such discipline. Silence is indispensable if we hope to add depth to our spiritual life.

Fleeing to Jesus as our Refuge from weariness: *Helps us in offering our selves in Surrender to God* - Trusting the Lord Completely: The Discipline of Surrender.

There is a wonderfully challenging book by the founder of Wheaton College, Dr. Edman. You will probably shake your head with understanding when I read the following words. Nothing better describes the give-and-take struggle of our early years as a Christian. They are words from a collection of Puritan prayers and devotions.

*When thou wouldst guide me*

*I control myself.*

*When thou wouldst be sovereign*

*I rule myself.*

*When thou wouldst take care of me*

*I suffice myself.*

*When I should depend on thy providings*

*I supply myself.*

*When I should submit to thy providence*

*I follow my will.*

*When I should study, honor, trust thee,*

*I serve myself;*

*I fault and correct thy laws*

*to suit myself,*

*Instead of thee I look to  
 Man's approbation,  
 And am by nature an idolater.  
 Lord, it is my chief design to bring my  
 heart back to Thee.[13]*

Fleeing to Jesus as our Refuge from weariness: *Helps us in True Preparation for worship* - – Preparation[14] - The answer to the problem begins with Saturday preparation. (Any men who interpret the following as women's work are wrong. Both husband and wife should share responsibility for the practical and spiritual preparations for the Lord's Day.) It is advisable that young families have their clothing clean and laid out on Saturday night, and even that the breakfast be decided upon. The whereabouts of Bibles and lessons should be known, and even better, ought to be collected and ready. There should be an agreed-upon time to get up which leaves plenty of time to get ready for church. Going to bed at a reasonable hour is also a good idea. Spiritually, prayer about the Lord's Day is essential –prayer for the service, the music, the pastors, one's family, and oneself. [15]

The Puritans understood this well. As one of their great preachers, George Swinnock, quaintly expressed it: Fleeing to Jesus as our Refuge from weariness: *Helps us Cultivate the Discipline of Simplicity in our Lives by Reordering*[16] One's Private World.

The Decision	The Discipline
to reorder one's private world	simplicity
to be still	silence
to cultivate serenity	solitude
to trust the Lord completely	surrender

Fleeing to Jesus as our Refuge from weariness: *Helps us in Genuine Expectancy of God's Presence* - This knowledge of God through his Word ought to heighten our expectations and instill healthy fear and reverence. As Annie Dillard wrote:

On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the Catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?...It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return. [17]

Fleeing to Jesus as our Refuge from weariness: *Helps us preserve our experience the depths of God in our lives* - How can we preserve our hearts for the Lord's Day. Edith[18] Schaeffer tells how, when living in Villars, Switzerland, the church bells would toll every Saturday at 4:30 P.M.

as a reminder to prepare for the Lord's Day. The bells were ignored by most but were a poignant reminder of a more enlightened day.

Is Christ your city of Refuge? Is He easy to reach to you? Are His arms open to you? Do you see His entrance as never locked, and that He is a completely sufficient refuge? Do you see that there is no other hope but Him? Then He is YOUR city of refuge.

## **How Do We Come to Christ Our Refuge?**

How can we start cultivating coming to Christ's promised refuge for the weary? Jesus demonstrated it is our priority, but where do we start? Here are some suggestions:

### **1. Read God's Word every day.**

Rest for your soul comes most readily by reading God's Word. This is the voice of God, and we must listen. No Christian can lead a Spirit-filled life full of power without regularly reading the Bible. Our minds are such that we do not retain what we need to know. They need to be refreshed again and again.

Some who have been believers for years have never read the Bible through even once. There are truths God has for us that we have not inconvenienced ourselves enough to discover. No wonder we are empty. What a difference reading the Word can make in our lives! Dr. Harry Ironside, a man of little formal education but great power, read the Bible fourteen times by the age of fourteen. His mark is still on Chicago and, indeed, the entire world.

Five pages a day is a good place to begin. At that pace, within a year you will have read the entire Bible. However, we must remember that we begin to get alone with God consistently only when we take God's Word seriously as more important even than our daily meals.

### **2. Memorize God's Word.**

Rest for your soul comes through memorization. Mrs. Barnhouse said of her famous preacher husband:

Someone once asked him how long it had taken him to prepare a certain sermon. His answer was "Thirty years and thirty minutes!" He had immersed himself in the Bible from the time he was fifteen years old, when he memorized the Book of Philippians a verse a day until he knew the entire book by heart, then went on to other passages. He felt it was not enough to learn by rote — it had to be by heart; because you loved and believed it.[19]

Few have lived as stressful and frenetic a life as Hudson Taylor, founder of China Inland Mission, but Taylor lived in God's rest, as his son beautifully attests:

Day and night this was his secret, "just to roll the burden on the Lord." Frequently those who were wakeful in the little house at Chinkiang might hear, at two or three in the morning, the soft refrain of Mr. Taylor's favorite hymn ["Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what Thou art"].

He had learned that for him, only one life was possible—just that blessed life of resting and rejoicing in the Lord under all circumstances, while He dealt with the difficulties, inward and outward, great and small.[20]

### **3. Meditate on God's Word.**

Rest for your soul comes also by meditation. This is the secret of God's great warriors. Hudson Taylor conquered immense hardships by daily meditation on God's Word. Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor record this in his biography:

It was not easy for Mr. Taylor, in his changeful life, to make time for prayer and Bible study, but he knew that it was vital. Well do the writers remember traveling with him month after month in northern China, by cart and wheelbarrow with the poorest of inns at night. Often with only one large room for coolies and travelers alike, they would screen off a corner for their father and another for themselves, with curtains of some sort; and then, after sleep at last had brought a measure of quiet, they would hear a match struck and see the flicker of candlelight which told that Mr. Taylor, however weary, was poring over the little Bible in two volumes always at hand. From two to four a.m. was the time he usually gave to prayer; the time he could be most sure of being undisturbed to wait upon God.[21]

Meditating upon the Word brings us immediately into the intimate presence of God, but too few are willing to pay the price. For those who do, however, the rewards are great. According to Psalm 1:1-3:

*Blessed is the man  
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,  
Nor stands in the path of sinners  
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;  
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.  
He shall be like a tree  
Planted by the rivers of water,  
That brings forth its fruit in its season.  
Whose leaf does not wither;  
And whatever he does shall prosper.*

C. T. Studd was one of God's great servants. His life was like his grass hut: There were no doors to shut. He lived with—and for—his beloved pygmy tribes. How did he prepare to teach as many as 5,000 at a time? How did he get ready to disciple the scores of church leaders who came to sit at the foot of his cot every morning, so that he would awake to a sea of black faces and white teeth waiting for him to open the Book of God to them? His diary dated February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1886, gives us the answer:

The Lord is so good to give me a large dose of spiritual champagne every morning which braces one up for the day and night. Of late I have had such glorious times. I generally awake about 3:30 AM and feel quite wide awake, so I have a good read, and then have an hour's sleep before I finally get up.[22]

Studd's family described these times this way: "A Bible is taken down from the shelf, and Bwana is alone with God. What passed between them in those silent hours was known a few hours later to all who had ears to hear." [23]

Studd continues in his diary:

I find then that what I read is then stamped indelibly upon my heart all through the day; and that it is the very quietest of times, not a foot astir, nor a sound to be heard, saving that of God. If I miss this time I feel like Samson shorn of his hair and so of all his strength. I see more and more how much I have to learn of the Lord. I want to be a workman approved of the Lord, not just with a pass degree as it were. Oh how I wish I had devoted my early life, my whole life to God and His Word. How much I have lost by those early years of self pleasing and running after this world's honors and pleasures." [24]

Repeat these refuge words 'Come unto me, all ye labouring and burdened ones, and I will give you rest,<sup>29</sup> take up my yoke upon you, and learn from me, because I am meek and humble in heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls,<sup>30</sup> for my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.' Youngs

- Matthew 11:28-30 *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*"

"I will give you rest" is literally, "I will rest you." "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" refers to the salvation of the sinner through Jesus Christ. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" refers to the practical sanctification of the believer. There is a *rest* which Jesus gives, and it is the rest of redemption. There is also a *rest* which the believer experiences, and it comes through commitment and consecration to Christ. You don't have to worry about being recognized; you don't have to jockey for position if you are committed to Christ. Frankly, I quit joining organizations because I got so tired of watching ambitious men trying to be chairman of something or trying to be president of something. If you are committed to Christ, you don't have to worry about that. He will put you exactly where *He* wants you when you are yoked up to Him.[25]

**“Come.”** The Pharisees all said “Do!” and tried to make the people follow Moses and the traditions. But true salvation is found only in a Person, Jesus Christ. To come to Him means to trust Him. This invitation is open to those who are exhausted and burdened down. That is exactly how the people felt under the yoke of pharisaical legalism (Matt. 23:4; Acts 15:10). **“Take.”** This is a deeper experience. When we come to Christ by faith, *He gives* us rest. When we take His yoke and learn, *we find* rest, that deeper rest of surrender and obedience. The first is “peace with God” (Rom. 5:1); the second is “the peace of God” (Phil. 4:6–8). To “take a yoke” in that day meant to become a disciple. When we submit to Christ, we are yoked to Him. The word “easy” means “well-fitting”; He has just the yoke that is tailor-made for our lives and needs. The burden of doing His will is not a heavy one (1 John 5:3). **“Learn.”** The first two commands represent a crisis as we come and yield to Christ; but this step is into a *process*. As we learn more about Him, we find a deeper peace, because we trust Him more. Life is simplified and unified around the person of Christ. This invitation is for “all”—not just the people of Israel (Matt. 10:5–6). [26]

Jesus invites us to take his yoke upon our shoulders. The Jews used the phrase *the yoke* for *entering into submission to*. They spoke of the yoke of the Law, the yoke of the commandments, the yoke of the Kingdom, the yoke of God. But it may well be that Jesus took the words of his invitation from something much nearer home than that. He says, “My yoke is *easy*.” The word *easy* is in Greek *chreustos*, which can mean *well-fitting*. In Palestine ox-yokes were made of wood; the ox was brought, and the measurements were taken. The yoke was then roughed out, and the ox was brought back to have the yoke tried on. The yoke was carefully adjusted so that it would fit well, and not gall the neck of the patient beast. The yoke was tailor-made to fit the ox. There is a legend that Jesus made the best ox-yokes in all Galilee, and that from all over the country men came to him to buy the best yokes that skill could make. In those days, as now, shops had their signs above the door; and it has been suggested that the sign above the door of the carpenter’s shop in Nazareth may well have been: “My yokes fit well.” It may well be that Jesus is here using a picture from the carpenter’s shop in Nazareth where he had worked throughout the silent years. Jesus says, “My yoke fits well.” What he means is: “The life I give you is not a burden to gall you; your task is made to measure to fit you.” Whatever God sends us is made to fit our needs and our abilities exactly.[27]

Unrest is one great characteristic of the world: hurry, vexation, failure, disappointment stare us in the face on every side. But here is hope: there is an ark of refuge for the weary, as truly as there was for Noah’s dove. There is rest in Christ, rest of conscience, and rest of heart, rest built on pardon of all sin, rest flowing from peace with God.[28]

A **yoke** was made of wood, hand-hewn to fit the neck and shoulders of the particular animal that was to wear it in order to prevent chafing. For obvious reasons, the term was widely used in the ancient world as a metaphor for submission. The **yoke** was part of the harness used to pull a cart, plow, or mill beam and was the means by which the animal’s master kept it under control and guided it in useful work. A student was often spoken of as being under the yoke of his teacher, and an ancient Jewish writing contains the advice: “Put your neck under the yoke and let your soul receive instruction.” That is the particular meaning Jesus seems to have had in mind here, because He adds, **and learn from Me**. *Manthanou* (to **learn**) is closely related to *matheutes* (disciple, or learner) and reinforces the truth that Christ’s disciples are His submissive learners.

They submit to Christ's lordship for many reasons, among the most important of which is to be taught by Him through His Word. A yoke symbolizes obedience, and Christian obedience includes learning from Christ.[29]

[1] McAfee, Cleland B. "Near to the Heart of God." *Amazing Grace—366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions*. Ed. Kenneth W. Osbeck. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1997.

[2] Robert Kanigel, "Too Much of a Good Thing?" *The Washington Post National Weekly Edition*, 12 January 1998, p. 25.

[3] Richard A. Swenson, M.D., *The Overload Syndrome*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: NAVPRESS, 1998, p. 97-98.

[4] Paul E. Billheimer, *Destined for the Throne: A New Look at the Bride of Christ* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1975), p. 53.

[5] Peg Zaemisch, "Relating Life Is Harder on the Run," *Dunn County News*, 26 November 1995, p. 4A.

[6] Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1989), p.56.

[7] Richard A. Swenson, M.D., *The Overload Syndrome*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: NAVPRESS, 1998, p 123-33.

[8] Richard A. Swenson, M.D., *The Overload Syndrome*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: NAVPRESS, 1998, p 123-33.

[9] (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1983), p.144.

[10] Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

[11] This section adapted and quotations taken from Margin by Richard Swenson, pp. 83-87.

[12] Murray, p.24.

[13] V. Raymond Edman, *The Disciplines of Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Scripture Press, 1948) 83.

[14] R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1991, p. 109-115.

[15] The following pamphlets are available from Chapel of the Air: #7245, *Getting Ready for Sunday* by David and Karen Mains; 7451, *Rules for the Sunday Search* by David R. Mains; #7454, *Preparation for Sunday*; #7462, *The Sunday Search: A Guide to Better Church Experiences* by Steve Bell.

[16] Charles Swindoll, *Intimacy with the Almighty*. Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing, Inc., 1996, p. 28.

[17] Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk* ( New York: Harper & Row, 1982), pp. 40, 41.

[18] R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of Grace*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1993, p. 82-84.

[20] Hughes, R. Kent. *Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ*. Wheaton: Crossway, 1997.

[21] Hughes. *Preaching the Word: Ephesians*.

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# Refuge for the Loneliness of Youth

## COR: Message Seven (050724AM)

One of the amazing paradoxes of our times is that we have come to the place in human history when people are totally alone—yet surrounded by crowds. Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is very lonely for many people.

Though there are more humans than ever before alive and around us—many find less fellowship, companionship, and fulfillment each year. We move past, around and by, more and more people each day—but know fewer and fewer.

We often move faster—but not closer. We often have more contact—but less touch. We have more and more relationships—but less and less depth. And all of this leads to that aching hollow of the soul known as loneliness.

Loneliness is when God takes something or someone out of my life—so He can be closest to me. This means that loneliness is a tool in God's hand, an opportunity for a right response by us His children. Don't let loneliness abuse you, use it to draw close to the Lord!

Open with me to Genesis 2. God has something to say about loneliness—it isn't good! From the pages of Genesis 2 before the Fall, God speaks His very first recorded words to man. Amazingly, in God's first words to man He addresses loneliness.

- *Genesis 2:18 And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."*

God solved that problem with Eve, and Adam was no longer alone. But soon after, sin arrived as Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Then came the sting of the most dreadful form of loneliness—alienation from God.

Because we are all fallen in Adam, we now experience loneliness in all of its many forms; none of them are good. Loneliness appears at times as that sense of emptiness, like we have a vacuum inside of us. Other times it is a feeling of desolation or of unsatisfied longings. Probably the most acute form of loneliness is when we lose someone close to us through disagreement, distance or death.

Loss of a life partner is a deep void; moving away from cherished places also cuts deeply. The loss of the comfortable and familiar can leave gaps in our hearts and painful voids. And as we see all around us, everyone involved in a divorce—the marriage partners, friends, family, and children—all are touched with an aching void and begin down a pathway of loneliness.

But, the loneliest person to ever live on this planet was Jesus Christ. Turn with me to John 16. Think of it—He left the best, closest, most intimate relationship in the Universe to come, to seek, and to save the lost. But even after all that He came and did, He said that even His closest friends on earth would abandon Him.

- *John 16:32 “Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.”*

Then on the cross Jesus experienced the ultimate loneliness. He was forsaken by God.

- *Matthew 27:46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*

So even this grief and sorrow we feel of loneliness--He is acquainted with; and even loneliness can be conquered by fleeing to Him as our refuge.

Loneliness has many forms—but one purpose. Loneliness is when God takes something or someone out of my life—so He can be closest to me. This means that loneliness is a tool in God’s hand, an opportunity for a right response by us His children.

Loneliness—if you ever feel it, know that He felt it. If you ever suffer feeling friendless—know that He is the friend who will stick closer than a brother. If you ever feel forsaken—remember He said that He would never leave you or forsake you. If you feel alone—trust the One who said I am with you always, to the end!

Turn with me again to Hebrews 6 as we look again at these precious words of security, comfort and hope—again there is so much MORE from God's Word for us!

- *Hebrews 6:18b ... we might have strong consolation, who have fled **for refuge** to lay hold of the hope set before us.*

Jesus Christ is presented to us as the refuge or place to go when we face six areas of our weakness: uncleanness, weariness, loneliness, helplessness, hopelessness, and temptation. We will stop at the third—loneliness.

First we saw an offer for those who have felt unclean and defiled by the world, the flesh, and the devil. Jesus is the refuge for the unclean. He can remove any stain that sin may leave upon your life. Christ's offer is "flee to me, I can cleanse" as we saw in Mark 1:41.

- *Mark 1:41 Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, “**I am willing; be cleansed.**”*

Then we saw an offer for those who have felt weary, worn out and unable to go on. Christ says, "come to Me—I can refresh you, I will renew you, I will comfort and strengthen you." That is what we saw last time in Matthew 11:28-30. So Jesus is the **refuge for the weary**. There is no sheep of His pasture that He doesn't invite to find rest in Him. He seeks us, finds us, and offers to us His perfect rest. Remember this week these words from Christ's lips:

- *Matthew 11:28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

We now come to the third promised ministry of Christ—He is the **refuge for the lonely**. He offers to us the promise that He is the closest; His fellowship is the sweetest; and He is the only unfailing source of companionship we will ever find.

Some of God's greatest servants were forged in the furnace of loneliness. **Moses** in the back side of the desert, **Daniel** in far off Babylon, **Joseph** in a pit, a palace and a prison in the very foreign world of Egypt, **Paul** in jail after jail in distant Roman cities, **David** in the caves and deserts of Judea, and the list could go on and on.

## **Christ is Portrayed as Our Lifelong Refuge from Loneliness**

HEBRON the third Old Testament city of refuge means “fellowship,” suggesting our fellowship with God in Christ, and also our fellowship with other believers. So the Lord Jesus is the **refuge for those who are alone and feel homeless**. Like Noah's dove, man is spiritually a homeless wanderer. There was no rest, no safety, and no fellowship outside of that ark. The repentant homeless prodigal found a refuge in his father's house and in his father's fellowship.

So Jesus is the **refuge for the homeless**. Jesus promised to always be with us. He leads us through life, meets us at death, carries us to our eternal home, and is with us (Emmanuel) forever. Remember these words from Christ's lips:

- *Matthew 28:20b “... and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.”*

So what are we to do the next time we feel the pangs of loneliness swirling around us?

There is one person more than any other who shows us the hope we can find in Christ for our loneliness. More than any other person mentioned in God's Word this person's life is laid down for us to see from every angle. His name was David, his discoveries about the Lord in the midst of piercing loneliness are recorded as testimonies in the book of Psalms.

As a mere mortal man, David was truly so much like us. He faced life and all its problems with a fervor and gusto that thrills our souls 3,000 years later.

Did you know that God has carved the life of David in the bedrock of His Word? David's testimony of how God is a refuge for all who are lonely is captured by the Psalms. In fact, David wrote Psalms or testimonies to God's faithfulness from each of the three stages of his life—from his youth or growing years, from his peak or his strong years, and from his old age or his waning years.

God's Word records these three eras of David's life, and in each of these segments David experiences intense loneliness. Lets examine them together and learn lessons from David's loneliness.

### **First We Find David's Testimony of God's Closeness during His Youth or Growing Years**

It is amazing but true according to researchers, that the most acute loneliness is thought to be felt by teenagers. Teens feel neither old nor young. They feel between both worlds and can't seem to connect with either, so they desperately try to find the acceptance and approval of their fellow teens. Loneliness is unexpected by teens when it comes, they are taken off guard and are ill prepared for its fierceness. Unlike the elderly who have felt the sting of being alone often, teens often haven't. So David's testimony from his teen years is especially powerful.

**David suffers the intense loneliness of youth as he worked for his family.** David found God was with him while alone as a young shepherd boy writing Psalms 19 and 23. He had many a lonely night in the fields, the woods, and the hill sides of Judea. Instead of hating and fleeing those lonely times, he turned them into meditations upon the faithfulness of God.

- ***Psalm 19 has three basic lessons:*** v. 1-6 explains that David meditated upon the character of God when he was alone; v. 7-11 explains that David listened to the Word of God when he was alone; v. 12-14 explains that David feared the disapproval God (heeded His Word) when he was alone.

Remember that one of the prime characteristics of teens is their incredible need for acceptance and approval? David was a teen, he felt this need deeply—yet he chose to focus that desire towards God. He wanted to have God's approval and acceptance of all that he did and said. Psalm 19:14 is a clear cry from a teen who was after God's own heart.

- ***Psalm 23 is the testimony of what you can learn about God in times of loneliness.*** As I read this familiar passage and you hear these well known truths—stop—and ask yourself, “Have I experienced this, or is it just a fact that I carry around in my head and not my heart?” Here we go, listen to David's testimony of what he experienced, what he clung to from his long dark nights, and long lonely days. As you listen, ask the Lord to give you the same desire, then echo each of David's affirmations and make them your own testimony. Confess these loneliness lessons and find them true!

### **Psalm 23:1-6**

- v. 1a The Lord is my shepherd; *(Lord, when I'm alone--shepherd me.) I am the Good Shepherd John 10.*
- v. 1b I shall not want. *(Lord, when I'm alone--satisfy me.) Whoever comes to me will never hunger or thirst John 6.*
- v. 2a He makes me to lie down in green pastures; *(Lord, when I'm alone--rest me.) And I will give you rest Matthew 11.*
- v. 2b He leads me beside the still waters. *(Lord, when I'm alone--lead me.) I am the Way John 14.*
- v. 3a He restores my soul; *(Lord, when I'm alone--restore me.)*
- v. 3b He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. *(Lord, when I'm alone--sanctify me.)*
- v. 4a Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, *(Lord, when I'm alone—walk with me.)*
- v. 4b I will fear no evil; *(Lord, when I'm alone--protect me.)*

- v. 4c For You are with me; *(Lord, when I'm alone--remind me.)*
- v. 4d Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. *(Lord, when I'm alone--comfort me.)*
- v. 5a You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; *(Lord, when I'm alone--calm me.) Let not your heart be troubled John 14.*
- v. 5b You anoint my head with oil; *(Lord, when I'm alone--empower me.) fill me with Your Spirit.*
- v. 5c My cup runs over. *(Lord, when I'm alone--fill me to overflowing.) Out of them shall flow rivers of living water John 7.*
- v. 6a Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; *(Lord, when I'm alone--surround me.) And of His fullness we have received grace upon grace John 1.*
- v. 6b And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. *(Lord, when I'm alone--point me heavenward.)*

# Refuge for the Loneliness of Life—Family Conflict

## COR: Message Eight (050731AM)

**Loneliness** "is the most desolate word in all human language. It is capable of hurling the heaviest weights the heart can endure.

It plays no favorites, ignores all rules of courtesy, knows neither border nor barrier, yields no mercy, refuses all bargains, and holds the clock in utter contempt. It cannot be bribed; it will not be left behind.

Crowds only make it worse, activity simply drives it deeper. Silent and destructive as a flooding river in the night, it leaves its slimy banks, seeps into our dwelling, and rises to a crest of despair. Tears fall from our eyes as groans fall from our lips—but loneliness, that uninvited guest of the soul, arrives at dusk and stays for dinner.

There is simply no other anguish like the consuming anguish of loneliness. Ask the inmate in prison this evening...or the uniformed man thousands of miles at sea or in some bar tonight...or the divorcee in that apartment...or the one who just buried his or her life's companion...or the couple whose arms ache for the child recently taken...or even the single, career-minded person who prepares a meal for one and goes to bed early, *alone*, [and] surrounded by the mute memory of yesterday's song and today's disappointment".[1]

But even this grief and sorrow we feel of loneliness--Christ is acquainted with; and even loneliness can be conquered by fleeing to Christ the refuge for the lonely.

Loneliness—if you ever feel it, know that He felt it. If you ever suffer feeling friendless—know that He is the friend who will stick closer than a brother. If you ever feel forsaken—remember He said that He would never leave you or forsake you. If you feel alone—trust the One who said I am with you always, to the end!

Though loneliness has many forms—it has but one purpose. Loneliness is when God takes something or someone out of my life—so He can be closest to me. This means that loneliness is a tool in God's hand, an opportunity for a right response by us His children.

Turn with me again to Hebrews 6. Jesus Christ is presented to us as the refuge or place to go when we face six areas of our weakness: uncleanness, weariness, loneliness, helplessness, hopelessness, and temptation. We will stop at the third—loneliness.

*Hebrews 6:18b ... we might have strong consolation, who have fled **for refuge** to lay hold of the hope set before us.*

### **Christ is Portrayed as Our Lifelong Refuge from Loneliness**

So how do we prepare for the next time we feel the pangs of loneliness swirling around us?

Some of God's greatest servants were forged in the furnace of loneliness. **Moses** is the back side of the desert, **Daniel** in far off Babylon, **Joseph** in a pit, a palace and a prison in the very foreign world of Egypt, **Paul** in jail after jail in distant Roman cities, but the most complete record is of **David** in the caves and deserts of Judea.

There is one person more than any other who shows us the hope we can find in Christ for our loneliness. More than any other person mentioned in God's Word this person's life is laid down for us to see from every angle. His name was David, his discoveries about the Lord in the midst of piercing loneliness are recorded as testimonies in the book of Psalms.

As a mere mortal man, David was truly, so much like us. He faced life and all its problems with a fervor and gusto that thrills our souls 3,000 years later.

Did you know that God has carved the life of David in the bedrock of His Word? David's testimony of how God is a refuge for all who are lonely is captured by the Psalms. In fact, David wrote Psalms or testimonies to God's faithfulness from each of the three stages of his life—from his youth or growing years, from his peak or his strong years, and from his old age or his waning years.

For just a moment let me describe the life of David to you. God's Word records over a dozen big events in David's life. We think David and Goliath, Old Testament, long ago and far away and no way it can help us—we face unemployment and cancer not sling shots and Philistines.

Here are the dozen big events David faced, that we often casually read as just facts about someone long ago and far away:

- In I Sam 19:11 as Saul tries to murder him;
- In First Samuel 20:35-42 as Jonathan warns him of the danger of Saul's wrath;
- In First Samuel 21:1-9 as he flees to Ahimelech the priest;
- In First Samuel 21:11 as he fled from Saul to the Philistine city of Gath;
- In First Samuel 22:1 as he fled from Gath and the Philistines;
- In First Samuel 22:1-2 as he moved into a cave at Adullam with an incredibly difficult group of men;
- In First Samuel 22:5 and 23:14-16 as he was hiding from Saul in the Wilderness of Hareth;
- In First Samuel 23:10-13 as he escapes from Saul at Keilah and goes into hiding in the mountains of Ziph;
- In First Samuel 24:1-16 after he spares the life of his mortal enemy King Saul;
- In First Samuel 23:29 as he hides in the cave at En-gedi;
- In First Samuel 25 in the Wilderness of Paran as he faces the danger of his anger toward Nabal "the fool" and as God delivers him;
- Finally in First Samuel 27 as he is grieved and endangered over the raid on his family and city of Ziklag.

What most of us do not realize, is that David was inspired by God to write 31 Psalms about these events. That means God gives us Divine Truth that was learned in these times of intense loneliness.

Can I repeat those same events in 21<sup>st</sup> Century language? That changes everything. If you listen closely you will find that David faced the very same struggles with loneliness that each of us will face some time in our earthly life.

And in these events are the troubles he actually faced, suffered, conquered--and wrote about in his Psalms. See if you can relate to David. And if any of these life situations come up—you have a word from God on what to do, how to respond in a way that strengthens you, and glorifies God!

**1. David suffers the intense loneliness of youth.** David was overlooked, ignored and even disliked by his family in First Samuel 16-18. He is left out of family gatherings, unrecognized for great achievements and basically left alone much of the time to do his “job” with the family’s flock of sheep. David writes—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are disappointed. David found God was with him while alone as a young shepherd boy writing *Psalms 19 and 23, as well as Psalms 8-9*. He had many a lonely night in the fields, the woods and the hill sides of Judea. Instead of hating and fleeing those lonely times, he turned them into meditations upon the faithfulness of God.

**2. David suffers intense loneliness of life as he faces family conflict and danger.** David writes *Psalms 11, 59, and 64*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we face conflict and danger.

**3. David suffers intense loneliness as he loses his job, and is separated from his family.** David writes *Psalms 52*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are away from our work, home, and family.

**4. David suffers intense loneliness as moves to a new location that is very foreign to him.** David wrote *Psalms 56 and 70*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in a new situation that is very foreign situation.

**5. David suffers intense loneliness as he lives and works with a tough crowd.** David wrote more Psalms in this period than at any other time in his life. These *cave Psalms are 4, 13, 34, 40, 57, 141-142*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are far from home and feel exiled.

**6. David suffers the intense loneliness of unemployment and unsettled home life.** David takes time to write *Psalms 17 and 63*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are insecure. This was a time of no sure place to live, no reliable source of income and provision.

**7. David suffers the intense loneliness when betrayed by friends.** David writes *Psalms 7, 31, 35-36, and 54* as he records his heart on how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are betrayed by those we trusted as friends.

**8. David suffers the intense loneliness when wronged in a business deal.** David writes *Psalms 53*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in danger of bitterness over being hurt in a business deal.

**9. David suffers the intense loneliness of the complete loss of his family, friends, and finances.** David writes *Psalms 16, 38 and 39*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we suffer the loss of family, or friends, or finances—or even all three at once.

**10. David suffers the intense loneliness of temptation and failure.** David writes *Psalms 32*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are tempted and fail.

**11. David suffers the intense loneliness of chastisement and restoration.** David writes *Psalms 51*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are chastened by the Lord and restored.

**12. Finally We Find David's Testimony Of God's Closeness During His Old Age or His Waning Years. David suffers the intense loneliness of old age.** David writes *Psalms 71 and 116*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are old, weak, and leave behind our health, comfort, friends, family, and security.

- Are you feeling the loneliness of youth? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of life facing family conflict and danger? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of job loss, and family separation? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of moving to a new location that is very foreign to you? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of living and working with a tough crowd? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of unemployment and unsettled home life? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of betrayal by friends? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of being wronged in a business deal? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of the complete loss of his family, friends, and finances? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of temptation and failure? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of chastisement and restoration? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of old age? *Jesus says I am always with you!*

Now, let's go through these twelve areas that God's Word addresses--one at a time, and see the situation, feel David's loneliness and then see the solution God showed him and then recorded for our use in this wonderful book—the Bible!

**1. David suffers the intense loneliness of family disappointments.** David was overlooked, ignored and even disliked by his family in First Samuel 16-18. He is left out of family gatherings, unrecognized for great achievements and basically left alone much of the time to do his “job” with the family’s flock of sheep. David is the giant killer and writes Psalms 8-9—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are disappointed. David found God was with him while alone as a young shepherd boy writing *Psalms 19 and 23*. He had many a lonely night in the fields, the woods and the hill sides of Judea. Instead of hating and fleeing those lonely times, he turned them into meditations upon the faithfulness of God. *Psalm 19 has three basic lessons*: v. 1-6 explains that David meditated upon the character of God when he was alone; v. 7-11 explains that David listened to the Word of God when he was alone; v. 12-14 explains that David feared the disapproval God (heeded His Word) when he was alone. *Psalm 23 is the testimony of what you can learn about God in times of loneliness*. Listen to David’s testimony of what he experienced, what he clung to from his long dark nights, and long lonely days. As you listen, ask the Lord to give you the same desire, then echo each of David’s affirmations and make them your own testimony. Confess these loneliness lessons and find them true!

### **Next We Find David’s Testimony of God’s Closeness During Life as David Was in His Peak Or His Strong Years**

**2. David suffers intense loneliness as he faces family conflict and danger.** These times of danger are from his boss and father-in-law King Saul. Instead of being eaten up by the intense loneliness he must have felt with job and family pressures all dumped on him at once--he expresses his needs to God.

His prayerful responses to these tough times are captured in the Psalms and show a pathway through loneliness to the One who is closest of all. The setting for Psalm 59 is I Sam 19:11 as Saul tries to murder him, in that time of feeling so alone David writes *Psalm 59*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in danger.

Here is the key--David always remember that God was with him; that is the ultimate cure for lonely times.

**Psalm 59:1-17** To the Chief Musician. Set to "Do Not Destroy." A Michtam of David when Saul sent men, and they watched the the house in order to kill him.

- v. 1 [**HE TURNS TO GOD**] *Deliver me from my enemies, O my God*; Defend me from those who rise up against me. 2 Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, And save me from bloodthirsty men. 3 For look, they lie in wait for my life; The mighty gather against me, Not [for] my transgression nor [for] my sin, O LORD. 4 They run and prepare themselves through no fault [of mine.] Awake to help me, and behold! 5 You therefore, O LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel, Awake to punish all the nations; Do not be merciful to any wicked transgressors. Selah 6 At evening they return, They growl like a dog, And go all around the city. 7 Indeed, they belch with their mouth; Swords [are] in their lips; For [they say,] "Who hears?" 8 But You, O LORD, shall laugh at them; You shall have all the nations in derision.

- v. 9 [HE TRUSTS IN GOD] *I will wait for You, [O You] his Strength*; For God [is] my defense; 10 My God of mercy shall come to meet me; God shall let me see [my desire] on my enemies. 11 Do not slay them, lest my people forget; Scatter them by Your power, And bring them down, O Lord our shield. 12 [For] the sin of their mouth [and] the words of their lips, Let them even be taken in their pride, And for the cursing and lying [which] they speak. 13 Consume [them] in wrath, consume [them,] That they [may] not [be,] And let them know that God rules in Jacob To the ends of the earth. Selah 14 And at evening they return, They growl like a dog, And go all around the city. 15 They wander up and down for food, And howl if they are not satisfied.
- v. 16 [HE TRIUMPHS THROUGH GOD] *But I will sing of Your power*; Yes, I will sing aloud of Your mercy in the morning; For You have been my defense And refuge in the day of my trouble. 17 To You, O my Strength, I will sing praises; For God [is] my defense, My God of mercy. (NKJV)

Psalm 59 has several key defenses to the paralysis of loneliness during times of conflict and danger. Note these truths David found (circle them or underline them in your Bibles) and then ask your self are these personalized yet in your life.

### David says the Lord is:

A defense (v. 9); a supply of mercy delivered (v. 10); a shield (v. 11); the ruler of all (v. 13); a defense and refuge in the day of trouble (v. 16); strength, defense, and mercy (v. 17). Now look back over those verses and change this from mere facts to personal reality. This method can transform your Bible study. This is how to apply God's Word to your life each day!

Here is how we do that. Note what David actually said starting in v. 9 “God is *my* defense”. He made it personal. He reached out and touched God by faith—and so can we when we face family conflict and danger. Remember this was David’s habit since his youth.

Can’t you just hear him singing that 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm out on the hills of Judea during those long and lonely nights? The Lord is *MY* Shepherd, *I* shall not want, He makes *ME*...

Go through David’s list and make it yours. Say to the Lord from your heart right now with me:

v. 9 Be my defense; v. 10 deliver mercy to *me*; v. 11 be *my* shield; v. 13 rule over *my* life; v. 16 be *my* refuge in times of trouble; v. 17 be *my* strength today, show *me* Your mercy now I need it so, and defend me from this painful loneliness!

See also Psalm 11 where the Lord always watches us. Like a dad on duty at the park with a small child so defenseless—keeps his eyes always upon them ready to spring into action as needed.

Psalm 64 where the Lord makes us glad (v. 10) even in our sad and lonely times.

- Are you feeling the loneliness of youth? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of life facing family conflict and danger? *Jesus says I am always with you!*

- Are you feeling the loneliness of job loss, and family separation? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of moving to a new location that is very foreign to you? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of living and working with a tough crowd? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of unemployment and unsettled home life? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of betrayal by friends? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of being wronged in a business deal? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of the complete loss of his family, friends, and finances? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of temptation and failure? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of chastisement and restoration? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of old age? *Jesus says I am always with you!*

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[1] Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life*, (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1983), p. 140.

# Refuge for the Loneliness of Life—Job Loss

## COR: Message Nine (050731PM)

Christ is our refuge. He is the place we go when life gets tough. When we feel unclean—flee to Him. When we feel weary to go on—flee to Him. And again this evening—when we feel the river of loneliness flooding the banks of our lives—flee to Him!

David faced the loss of his job and with it his security and comfort. Everything changes when you lose your job. It is like going from breathing to holding your breath. Everyone else has places to go and things to do—and you have nothing to do and if you went you wouldn't want to spend any money.

Our world is increasingly noting the mental and emotional troubles that come hand in hand with losing your job. Recently the headlines of Germany's largest newspaper read, "Germany's new 'great depression'". Here is the article:

**Record numbers of Germans are suffering from depression and other mental illnesses, a new report says.** According to the research, by a German health insurance firm, cases of depression among Berliners have risen by 70% since 1997. Up to 70% of Germans also say they are prepared to seek professional help for psychological problems. Mental health experts blamed the rise on Germany's faltering economy, which has seen unemployment rise to over 5m. German insurance firm DAK surveyed 2.6m employed Germans in an effort to discover the impact depression is having on modern working patterns.

**Vicious circle.** Workers in Germany's capital, regarded as one of Europe's most vibrant modern cities, emerged as an unhappy bunch more likely to miss work through depression than for any other reason. "In times of economic insecurity, young people in particular tend to develop psychological problems in response to professional and private obstacles," said DAK's Chief Executive Herbert Rebscher.

Nevertheless, most respondents said they would rather be depressed with a job than unemployed and happy. "How will someone ever get better," Burghard Klopp, a depression expert at Berlin's Charité hospital, told German broadcaster Deutsche Welle, "when they know their boss is just waiting to fire them?"[1]

So, not much has changed in 3,000 years has it?

Loneliness—if you ever feel it, know that He felt it. If you ever suffer feeling friendless—know that He is the friend who will stick closer than a brother. If you ever feel forsaken—remember He said that He would never leave you or forsake you. If you feel alone—trust the One who said I am with you always, to the end!

Though loneliness has many forms—it has but one purpose. Loneliness is when God takes something or someone out of my life—so He can be closest to me. This means that loneliness is a tool in God's hand, an opportunity for a right response by us His children.

## Christ is Portrayed as Our Lifelong Refuge from Loneliness

So how do we prepare for the next time we feel the pangs of loneliness swirling around us?

There is one person more than any other who shows us the hope we can find in Christ for our loneliness. More than any other person mentioned in God's Word this person's life is laid down for us to see from every angle. His name was David, his discoveries about the Lord in the midst of piercing loneliness are recorded as testimonies in the book of Psalms.

### 12 Big Events David Faced

Here are the dozen big events David faced, that we often casually read as just facts about someone long ago and far away:

**1. David suffers the intense loneliness of youth.** David was overlooked, ignored and even disliked by his family in First Samuel 16-18. He is left out of family gatherings, unrecognized for great achievements and basically left alone much of the time to do his "job" with the family's flock of sheep. David writes—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are disappointed. David found God was with him while alone as a young shepherd boy writing *Psalms 19 and 23, as well as Psalms 8-9*. He had many a lonely night in the fields, the woods and the hill sides of Judea. Instead of hating and fleeing those lonely times, he turned them into meditations upon the faithfulness of God.

**2. David suffers intense loneliness of life as he faces family conflict and danger.** David writes *Psalms 11, 59, and 64*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we face conflict and danger.

**3. David suffers intense loneliness as he loses his job, and is separated from his family.** David writes *Psalms 52*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are away from our work, home, and family.

**4. David suffers intense loneliness as moves to a new location that is very foreign to him.** David wrote *Psalms 56 and 70*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in a new situation that is very foreign situation.

**5. David suffers intense loneliness as he lives and works with a tough crowd.** David wrote more Psalms in this period than at any other time in his life. These *cave Psalms are 4, 13, 34, 40, 57, 141-142*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are far from home and feel exiled.

**6. David suffers the intense loneliness of unemployment and unsettled home life.** David takes time to write *Psalms 17 and 63*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are insecure. This was a time of no sure place to live, no reliable source of income and provision.

**7. David suffers the intense loneliness when betrayed by friends.** David writes *Psalms 7, 31, 35-36, and 54* as he records his heart on how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are betrayed by those we trusted as friends.

**8. David suffers the intense loneliness when wronged in a business deal.** David writes *Psalms 53*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in danger of bitterness over being hurt in a business deal.

**9. David suffers the intense loneliness of the complete loss of his family, friends, and finances.** David writes *Psalms 16, 38 and 39*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we suffer the loss of family, or friends, or finances—or even all three at once.

**10. David suffers the intense loneliness of temptation and failure.** David writes *Psalms 32*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are tempted and fail.

**11. David suffers the intense loneliness of chastisement and restoration.** David writes *Psalms 51*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are chastened by the Lord and restored.

**12. Finally We Find David's Testimony Of God's Closeness During His Old Age or His Waning Years. David suffers the intense loneliness of old age.** David writes *Psalms 71 and 116*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are old, weak, and leave behind our health, comfort, friends, family, and security.

Now, let's go to the third of these twelve areas that God's Word addresses—one at a time, and see the situation, feel David's loneliness and then see the solution God showed him and then recorded for our use in this wonderful book—the Bible!

**1. David suffers intense loneliness as he loses his job.** In First Samuel 21:1-9 as he flees to Ahimelech the priest, David writes *Psalms 52*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are out of work.

**David lost his job.** David has fled from his home because of the dangers facing him. But in fleeing he also leaves behind his job. David had been continuously employed since his earliest youth.

**David had always had a job.** That is often who this hits the hardest—those who have never felt the sting of loss. David never had time to think about unemployment, he had tended the sheep, worked as a courier for his dad during the war by taking provisions to his brothers in the army. Then after defeating Goliath he had been hired by the government (King Saul) and worked in the various departments: entertainment (he played his harp), military (he was sent out to raid and kill the enemy Philistines), and finally as a member of the cabinet (he sat at Saul's table as his son-in-law and advised him on security and military issues and led a squad of warriors for the king).

**David was up to his neck in work when this happened.** David lived by the king, worked for the king, was married to the king's daughter, ate with the king, served the king with music, and found all of his financial and family security in that job. But everything changed and David loses

that job by a clear notice from his employer. Saul throws a spear at him and tries to kill David. That is the “pink slip” of 3,000 years ago. It was more direct and blunt back then.

**This was a big surprise to everyone but God.** So recently unemployed for the first time David faces life, looks at his situation and finds the pain that always surrounds such a sudden and unexpected change in everything he had relied upon. Everything but what was most important.

**David reverts to his default system.** When the unexpected comes we usually respond by reflex. What was David’s habit of life, what he did without thinking very long? David had trusted the Lord from his youth, and though his job ended—his relationship with the Good Shepherd hadn’t changed a bit. That is exactly how Psalm 52 begins. Turn there with me.

v. 1 God is good no matter what!

v. 2-4 People will always hurt us.

v. 5-7 Take God as your strength in times like this.

v. 8-9 Wait for God, cling to Him, grow through the alone time!

Psalm 52:9 I will praise You forever, Because You have done it; And in the presence of Your saints ***I will wait*** (*hupomeno*) on Your name, for it is good.

Remember that word we studied- ***hupomeno***. It means to cling, holding on tight or holding on for dear life. This is the word that God gives us is describing **WAITING HOPE**—it is the rendering of the Hebrew word **QAVAH (6960): HOPE THAT RENEWS EXHAUSTED STRENGTH**. To better grasp this word, turn with me to the most well known verse in the Bible using this special word which is Isaiah 40:29-31.

*Isaiah 40:29-31 He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. 30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, But those who **wait** [*hupomeno* LXX; Strongs #5278 endure] on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.*

This Hebrew verb means to 'twist and or stretch'. In the Old Testament world it was used of making rope by twisting and stretch many weak strands into a strong rope. Then this concept of rope making became a metaphor for waiting and receiving strength during weak times to endure stretching, twisting, and painful times in life.

Those who trust God enough to take His help as He weaves His Word into our weaknesses--so that His waiting hope will make us strong. That is why He even allows all these problems, struggles, trials, and unexpected reversals into our lives. To twist and stretch us into waiting hope!

**2. David suffers intense loneliness as moves to a new location not by choice, and under duress.** In First Samuel 21:11 as he fled from Saul to the Philistine city of Gath, David wrote ***Psalms 56 and 70***—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in a foreign situation.

God loves to be needed, sought, and asked to help. Think of all the times in life you go to places with a struggle in your heart; that is exactly what David felt.

When you go to camp and it is not one you are comfortable with, or those first hours and days in college, or the military, or when you enter a new career, or move to new area and maybe it is not as secure as you like, or its being left in the hospital or a rest home...there are many times in life we face a lonely struggle.

And what was the way David prepared for a new location with anticipated struggles? In Psalm 56 we find no less than nine resolves for facing a “distant land” a lonely new place of struggle. Here they are:

Psalm 56:3-11 Whenever I am afraid, ***I will trust in You***. 4 In God (***I will praise His word***), In God ***I have put my trust, I will not fear***. What can flesh do to me? 5 All day they twist my words; All their thoughts are against me for evil. 6 They gather together, They hide, they mark my steps, When they lie in wait for my life. 7 Shall they escape by iniquity? In anger cast down the peoples, O God! 8 You number my wanderings; Put my tears into Your bottle; Are they not in Your book? 9 When I cry out to You, Then my enemies will turn back; This ***I know***, because ***God is for me***. 10 In God (***I will praise His word***), In the Lord (***I will praise His word***), 11 In God ***I have put my trust, I will not be afraid***. What can man do to me?

Psalm 70:1-5 Make haste, O God, to deliver me! Make haste to help me, O Lord! 2 Let them be ashamed and confounded Who seek my life; Let them be turned back and confused Who desire my hurt. 3 Let them be turned back because of their shame, Who say, “Aha, aha!” 4 ***Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; And let those who love Your salvation say continually, “Let God be magnified!”*** 5 But I am poor and needy; Make haste to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay.

David turned, trusted, and triumphed—that is his pattern. Whether it was the family conflicts and dangers that left him all alone, or this job loss—he always turned to God, trusts in His promises, and is led in triumph. That kind of echoes a New Testament verse we all know doesn't it?

2 Corinthians 2:14 Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.

Are you a fragrance at the unemployment office for Christ or not for Christ? Can people tell you are turning to God or to despair? Can your wife see you are trusting God or panicking? Does God see you being led in triumph or sinking in pity? Remember we can't change most of our circumstances—but we can change our attitude in them!

**3. David suffers intense loneliness as he lives and works with a tough crowd.** In First Samuel 22:1 as he fled from Gath and the Philistines, David wrote *Psalm 34*. In First Samuel 22:1-2 as he moved into a cave at Adullam with an incredibly difficult group of men, David wrote more Psalms than at any other time in his life. These *cave Psalms are 4, 13, 40, 57, 141-142*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are far from home and feel exiled.

I wonder have you ever felt prehistoric? And I know if you've watched television very much you've seen the conditions of what cave men look like. For them life reduced to grunts and groans. And life is an endless pursuit of nothingness at times. I like the way Edna St. Vincent Mallay put it a few years ago she said: "life must go on . . . I just can't remember why".

That's what I'm talking about--- a cave man sort of existence. A life when a vicious swirl of getting up, going to work out of the home or in the home if you're a mom--- dropping into bed exhausted at the end of the day only to find out that the entire month has gone by and falling further behind instead of ahead. That's the kind of life that I'm talking about and it's not foreign to most of us. We know what it's like; we know what it's like when it's hard.

LIKE DAVID WE NEED TO GLORIFY GOD IN EVERY SITUATION. Compare 1 Sam. 21:13-15 with the record in Psalm 34: v. 13 So he changed his behavior before them, feigned madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard. 14 Then Achish said to his servants, "Look, you see the man is insane. Why have you brought him to me? 15 "Have I need of madmen, that you have brought this [fellow] to play the madman in my presence? Shall this [fellow] come into my house?" (NKJV)

Psalm 34:1-22 A Psalm of David when he pretended madness before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed. I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise [shall] continually [be] in my mouth. 2 My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; The humble shall hear [of it] and be glad. Psalm 34:3 Oh, magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together.[ HE GIVES GLORY TO GOD]

1. Psalm 34:4 I sought the LORD, [*even in tough times he always sought for God*] and He heard me, And delivered me from all my fears. 5 They looked to Him and were radiant, And their faces were not ashamed.

2. Psalm 34:6 This poor man cried out, [*During tough times he had a proper view of himself; he was poor in spirit as Christ would later say.*] and the LORD heard [him,] And saved him out of all his troubles. 7 The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, And delivers them.

3. Psalm 34:8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD [is] good; [*he had a personal experience of God*] Blessed [is] the man [who] trusts in Him!

4. Psalm 34:9 Oh, fear the LORD, [*During tough times he practiced the presence of God, acknowledging Him is to fear him. it changed his behavior. If we believe right we will behave right!*] you His saints! [There is] no want to those who fear Him. 10 The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good [thing.] 11 Come, you

children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. 12 Who [is] the man [who] desires life, And loves [many] days, that he may see good? 13 Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit. 14 Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it.

5. Psalm 34:15 The eyes of the LORD [are] on the righteous, [During tough times he knew he was in touch with God] And His ears [are open] to their cry. 16 The face of the LORD [is] against those who do evil, To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. 17 [The righteous] cry out, and the LORD hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles. 18 The LORD [is] near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit. 19 Many [are] the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all. 20 He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken. 21 Evil shall slay the wicked, And those who hate the righteous shall be condemned. 22 The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, And none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned. [During tough times the cross is the ultimate refuge] (NKJV)

Psalm 57:4 My soul is among lions; I lie among the sons of men Who are set on fire, Whose teeth are spears and arrows, And their tongue a sharp sword.

Some practical steps to overcome loneliness are these:

- **Live with mysteries.** We can't always know why God is allowing circumstances—but we do know we can trust Him to do all things well. Jesus said to His disciples in John 13:7, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.”
- **Accept your situation.** What is unchangeable must be accepted and lived through by God's grace. As Paul said, we must echo, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13)
- **Use lonely times to grow.** One of the greatest truths we can discover is that lonely times usually accomplish great discoveries about God. David is at the depth of loneliness. He has been on the run for years and now he is hiding in a desolate cave in a crowd of malcontents, feeling very much alone. He has two choices. Stay in the cave of loneliness, descend into self-pity and sin or look up and use the time alone to grow.

Guess what he does? Psalm 142:5-7 is the answer. Why don't you take a moment and mark these for someone else who may need them someday. Or even for you if you ever feel the twinge of loneliness in your life. Look now and find:

- When alone I learn that You alone are my true REFUGE. Psalm 142:5a: **loneliness means its time to flee to your Refuge**. I will believe Your promise and turn to You as my Refuge right now.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true PORTION. Psalm 142:5b: **loneliness means its time to feed on your Portion**. I will believe Your promise to be all I need in this hard time.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true LISTENER. Psalm 142:6 'Give heed my cry': **loneliness means its time to speak to your Master**. I will believe Your promise and pour out all my troubles to You who care for me.

- When alone I learn that You alone are my true *DELIVERER* "bring" Psalm 142:7a: ***loneliness means its time to trust in your Redeemer.*** I will believe Your promise and let You rescue me now.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true *OBJECT OF WORSHIP* Psalm 142:7b: ***loneliness means its time to adore your Lord.*** I will believe Your promise and worship You even when I don't feel like it.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true *PROVIDER* "surround" Psalm 142:7c: ***loneliness means its time to rest in His Sufficient Provision.*** I will believe Your promise and let You surround me now with everything I need.

So again we ask ourselves—is Christ my refuge? Is that a personal chosen reality or just a fact I've heard? God will rock your boat just to see what you will do. Loneliness is a tool to glorify God, to turn and trust and triumph, and to make some great discoveries about God.

- Are you feeling the loneliness of youth? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of life facing family conflict and danger? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of job loss, and family separation? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of moving to a new location that is very foreign to you? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of living and working with a tough crowd? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of unemployment and unsettled home life? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of betrayal by friends? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of being wronged in a business deal? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of the complete loss of his family, friends, and finances? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of temptation and failure? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of chastisement and restoration? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of old age? *Jesus says I am always with you!*

**4. David suffers the intense loneliness of unemployment and unsettled home life.** In First Samuel 22:5 and 23:14-16 as he was hiding from Saul in the Wilderness of Hareth, David takes time to write ***Psalms 17 and 63***—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are insecure. This was a time of no sure place to live, no reliable source of income and provision.

**5. David suffers the intense loneliness when betrayed by friends.** In First Samuel 23:10-13 as he escapes from Saul at Keilah and goes into hiding in the mountains of Ziph, David writes ***Psalms 31 and 54***. In First Samuel 24:1-16 after he spares the life of his mortal enemy King Saul, David records his heart in ***Psalm 7***. In First Samuel 23:29 as he hides in the cave at En-

gedi, David writes *Psalms 35-36*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are betrayed.

**6. David suffers the intense loneliness when wronged in business.** In First Samuel 25 in the Wilderness of Paran as he faces the danger of his anger toward Nabal “the fool” and as God delivers him, David writes *Psalms 53*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in danger of bitterness.

**7. David suffers the intense loneliness of the complete loss of his family, friends, and finances.** Finally in First Samuel 27 as he is grieved and endangered over the raid on his family and city of Ziklag, David writes *Psalms 16, 38 and 39*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in threat of loss.

**8. David suffers the intense loneliness of temptation and failure.** From the depths of conviction after his fall into sin with Bathsheba in II Samuel 11, David writes *Psalms 32*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are tempted and fail.

**9. David suffers the intense loneliness of chastisement and restoration.** From the pain of chastisement that leads to repentance and restoration in II Samuel 12, David sings of his faithful God in *Psalms 51*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in chastisement and restoration.

### **Finally We Find David’s Testimony Of God’s Closeness During His Old Age or His Waning Years**

**10. David suffers the intense loneliness of old age.** And finally, at the end of his magnificent life, David extolls his Master and King in *Psalms 18*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in our last days before death. Especially note his life long praise to God in Psalm 18:46 The Lord lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let the God of my salvation be exalted.

Psalm 71 Christ our Refuge in the Loneliness of Weakness and Sickness before Death

Psalm 116 the Christ our Refuge in the Loneliness of Death

- ***We are not lonely at death if we always remember He hears us.*** Psalm 116:1 I love the Lord, because He has heard My voice and my supplications.
- ***We are not lonely at death if we pour out our fears and needs.*** Psalm 116:2 Because He has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live.
- ***We are not lonely at death if we always remember that troubles and sorrows are neither wrong nor avoidable.*** Psalm 116:3 The pains of death surrounded me, And the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. Every great saint since the Garden of Eden (except two) have died in pain of one form or another. Jesus died most painfully. It is not wrong or sinful to have troubles and sorrows—it is normal and also a part of God’s plan.
- ***We are not lonely at death if we seek the Lord’s aid when life hurts.*** Psalm 116:4 Then I called upon the name of the Lord: “O Lord, I implore You, deliver my soul!”

- ***We are not lonely at death if we praise Him for His mercy and goodness that have followed us all through our life.*** Psalm 116:5-7 Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; Yes, our God is merciful. 6 The Lord preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me. 7 Return to your rest, O my soul, For the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.
- ***We are not lonely at death if we make it a habit to walk with God each day we live.*** Psalm 116:8-10 For You have delivered my soul from death, My eyes from tears, And my feet from falling. 9 I will walk before the Lord In the land of the living. 10 I believed, therefore I spoke, “I am greatly afflicted.” The same One who walks through life with us keeps walking and takes us through the Valley of Death’s shadows. And shadows of death are all we get—not death. Jesus said who ever lives and believes in Him will never die.
- ***We are not lonely at death if we drink from the cup of salvation.*** Psalm 116:12-13 What shall I render to the Lord For all His benefits toward me? 13 I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the Lord. Believers never die!
- ***We are not lonely at death if we seek to obey Him during life.*** Psalm 116:14 I will pay my vows to the Lord Now in the presence of all His people. Jesus said His sheep hear His voice, follow Him—and He gives them endless life, even when their body dies!
- ***We are not lonely at death if we serve Him in life.*** Psalm 116:15-16 Precious in the sight of the Lord Is the death of His saints. 16 O Lord, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds. Serving God is what saints are going to be doing forever!
- ***We are not lonely at death if we thank Him through life.*** Psalm 116:17-19 I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, And will call upon the name of the Lord. 18 I will pay my vows to the Lord Now in the presence of all His people, 19 In the courts of the Lord’s house, In the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!

Some practical steps to overcome loneliness are these:

1. ***Deal with sin.*** Be sure that there is no unconfessed or unforsaken sin left in your life to give the Devil a place in your life. (Eph. 4:27)
2. ***Share your burdens.*** Clearly tell the Lord all your fears, all your struggles, all your pains—remember that He knows our frame that we are dust. (Psalm 103)
3. ***Abandon all self-pity.*** Constant self-sorrow is a one way ticket to loneliness. Self-pity denies we have a responsibility to deal with our emotions and thus frustrates any cure. As Jesus said, coming after Him means we deny our self (Luke 9:23)

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[1] BBC News Monday, 18 April, 2005

## A Refuge for the Unexpected Changes of Life COR: Message Ten (050807AM)

Christ is our refuge; Christ is my refuge--that is what we each need to learn. And to learn that wonderful truth we are in the midst of a six stop tour of Christ's promises.

Christ our refuge is the safest spot in the Universe. He is the place we go when life gets tough.

- When we feel unclean—we flee to Him and hear Him say to us, "I am willing, be cleansed".
- When we feel too weary to go on—we flee to Him and hear Him say, "Come to me...I will give you rest".
- When we feel all alone—we flee to Him and hear Him say, "I am with you always".

We have seen Christ's presence during the loneliness of youth, during the loneliness of job loss and unemployment. This morning, when life brings unexpected changes and we feel the river of loneliness flooding the banks of our lives—we can again know that it is time to flee to Him!

### **Christ is Our Lifelong Refuge from Loneliness**

Loneliness—if you ever feel it, know that He felt it. If you ever suffer feeling friendless—know that He is the friend who will stick closer than a brother. If you ever feel forsaken—remember He said that He would never leave you or forsake you. If you feel alone—trust the One who said I am with you always, to the end!

We are using the testimony of David who faced nearly every form of loneliness known to man—as our guide. God has captured for us both David's deepest distresses and his precious victories in the form of songs or Psalms--of God's faithfulness through David's troubles.

Remember what David faced? God's Word records more than a dozen key events that were terribly lonely for David. Let me remind you of them again.

1. David suffers the intense loneliness of youth.
2. David suffers intense loneliness of life as he faces family conflict and danger.
3. David suffers intense loneliness as he loses his job, and is separated from his family.
4. David suffers intense loneliness as moves to a new location that is very foreign to him.
5. David suffers intense loneliness as he lives and works with a tough crowd.
6. David suffers the intense loneliness of unemployment and unsettled home life.
7. David suffers the intense loneliness when betrayed by friends.
8. David suffers the intense loneliness when wronged in a business deal.
9. David suffers the intense loneliness of the complete loss of his family, friends, and finances.

10. David suffers the intense loneliness of temptation and failure.

11. David suffers the intense loneliness of chastisement and restoration. \_

12. David suffers the intense loneliness of old age. \_

Last time we saw the third area as **David suffers intense loneliness as he loses his job**. In First Samuel 21:1-9 as he flees to Ahimelech the priest, David writes *Psalm 52*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are out of work.

- *David lost his job.*
- *David had always had a job.*
- *David was up to his neck in work when this happened.*
- *This was a big surprise to everyone but God.*
- *David reverts to his default system.*

v. 1 God is good no matter what!

v. 2-4 People will always hurt us.

v. 5-7 Take God as your strength in times like this.

v. 8-9 Wait for God, cling to Him, grow through the alone time!

Now, lets go to the fourth of these twelve areas that God's Word addresses--and see the situation, feel David's loneliness and then see the solution God showed him and then recorded for our use in this wonderful book—the Bible!

**David suffers intense loneliness as moves to a new location not by choice, and under duress.** In First Samuel 21:11 as he fled from Saul to the Philistine city of Gath, David wrote *Psalms 56, 34 and 70*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in a foreign situation.

When you go to camp and it is not one you are comfortable with, or those first hours and days in college, or the military, or when you enter a new career, or move to new area and maybe it is not as secure as you like, or its being left in the hospital or a rest home...there are many times in life we face a lonely struggle.

**Nothing is too small for God's care.** Someone once asked, “How small can a need of mine be before it is too small for me to bring to God?” To which we say, is anything in the Universe not *small* to God?

If you read the 73 Psalms that David writes and signs you get the impression that His life was filled with constant trouble, countless dangers, and relentless stress. Before we jump into Psalms 56 and 70 let me ask you to consider something. If that life of trouble, danger, and stress was the experience of David—why do we get so surprised when it is what we also experience?

When we are desperate God is not. When we are alone—God is there. When we are troubled—God is a very present refuge and help for us to flee into His waiting arms.

**God loves to be needed, sought, and asked to help.** Think of all the times in life you go to places with a struggle in your heart; that is exactly what David felt.

Please open with me to Psalm 56 and stand as we read it.

Psalm 56:1-13 Be merciful to me, O God, for man would swallow me up; Fighting all day he oppresses me. 2 My enemies would hound me all day, For there are many who fight against me, O Most High. 3 Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. 4 In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me? 5 All day they twist my words; All their thoughts are against me for evil. 6 They gather together, They hide, they mark my steps, When they lie in wait for my life. 7 Shall they escape by iniquity? In anger cast down the peoples, O God! 8 You number my wanderings; Put my tears into Your bottle; Are they not in Your book? 9 When I cry out to You, Then my enemies will turn back; This I know, because God is for me. 10 In God (I will praise His word), In the Lord (I will praise His word), 11 In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? 12 Vows made to You are binding upon me, O God; I will render praises to You, 13 For You have delivered my soul from death. Have You not kept my feet from falling, That I may walk before God In the light of the living?

Now what are the details of **Psalm 56**?

- **David was all alone.** No army (they start joining him according to I Samuel 22 after Gath), no family, no friends, nothing.
- **David was desperate.** What type of fear would make someone run away from home and into the hometown of the very person you killed in public, before thousands of witnesses. That's right, this is Gath the hometown of the best known fighter of the Philistine nation—Goliath. For David to walk into town with his picture on a thousand most wanted posters means that he was in complete desperation.
- **David was afraid.** He had made a mistake. He just left Nob all alone as we saw last time (I Samuel 21.9) with the sword of Goliath. There was no sword like it.

And now all alone he walks into Gath; he walks in with the accent of a Hebrew from Judea; he walks in holding the only sword in existence that was quite like this one, held by Gath's champion Goliath—and they spotted him, caught him, and now are imprisoning him. Psalm 34 was written after this event; Psalm 56 is during the event.

So what would God have us to do when all alone and in the worst situation we can imagine? Look at the tune again “dove”. In Psalm 55 David says he wished he could fly away from his troubles on the wings of a dove. Now his troubles have arrested him.

**Seek God.** What could possibly be better than the wings of a dove in a situation like this when you are all alone? Better than a dove or its wings is the God who made the dove! And that is just where David goes!

**Cry out to Him.** Four times in three verses (v. 4, 10-11) David cries to Elohim—the Creator of the dove and everything else!

**Remember His closeness in alone times.** This Psalm was very popular. Psalm 56 is quoted by the writer of Hebrews 13:6 (Psalm 56:4, 11); by Paul in Romans 8:31 (Psalm 56:9); and most of all by Jesus Himself in John 8:12.

John 8:12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”

Real life is only lived in Christ; real light comes only by the sunshine of His Face; real peace is only in His Presence—and that is what David found.

**Remember that God cares.** The tears in the bottle phrase speaks loudly of God’s promise to never leave us, never forget us, and never be indifferent to the cares of any of his children.

And what was the way David survived the intense loneliness of this horribly foreign place? In Psalm 56 we find no less than nine resolves David made while facing the “distant land” of a lonely new place of struggle. Here they are:

Psalm 56:3-11

1. Whenever I am afraid, ***I will trust in You.***
2. v. 4a In God (***I will praise His word,***
3. v. 4b In God ***I have put my trust;***
4. v. 4c ***I will not fear.*** What can flesh do to me? 5 All day they twist my words; All their thoughts are against me for evil. 6 They gather together, They hide, they mark my steps, When they lie in wait for my life. 7 Shall they escape by iniquity? In anger cast down the peoples, O God! 8 You number my wanderings; Put my tears into Your bottle; Are they not in Your book?
5. v. 9 When I cry out to You, Then my enemies will turn back; This ***I know,*** because ***God is for me.***
6. v. 10a In God (***I will praise His word,***
7. v. 10b In the Lord (***I will praise His word,***
8. v. 11a In God ***I have put my trust;***
9. v. 11b ***I will not be afraid.*** What can man do to me?

On January 14<sup>th</sup> 1856 David Livingstone wrote in his journal that the savages that had surrounded his camp in warlike hostility had driven him to so much fear, he was preparing to flee under the cover of darkness and give up his quest for the lost souls of Dark Africa.

Then he says that he remembered Christ's words that “Lo I am with you always” and took the promises right here in Psalm 56, “when I am afraid I will trust in you”. He went on to be one of the greatest missionary of all times. We like David and the saints of the ages need to rest in God’s promises.

## **A Refuge for the Overwhelmed**

### **COR: Message Eleven (050807PM)**

When life unexpectedly overwhelms us and we feel we can't go on and we feel all alone—what do we do? David faced that as well as so many of God's faithful servants through the years. Just because we love and serve the Lord doesn't mean we miss the storms and skids of life.

Open with me to one of the gravest hours in the life of David. I Samuel 21:10-15.

- 1 Samuel 21:10-15 Then David arose and fled that day from before Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath. 11 And the servants of Achish said to him, "Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of him to one another in dances, saying: 'Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands'?" 12 Now David took these words to heart, and was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. [***That is the setting for Psalm 56***] 13 So he changed his behavior before them, pretended madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard. 14 Then Achish said to his servants, "Look, you see the man is insane. Why have you brought him to me? 15 Have I need of madmen, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?" [***That is the setting for Psalm 34 and then later, Psalm 70***].

David bottoms out emotionally, he is unable to go on because of complete fear, loneliness, and danger. So he puts on an act like he has lost his mind. Not everything David did was right—but the inspired lessons are always right. The key to this time in David's life is found not in the short term events, but in the long term direction of his heart!

Paul spoke most personally of his struggles in 2 Corinthians. Listen to his struggles with unexpected situations that overwhelmed his life.

- 2 Corinthians 1:8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.
- 2 Corinthians 4:7-10 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. 8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

David had found a place he could always reach for safety and security—in any situation. The Lord was his refuge; the Lord is our refuge also. Christ our refuge is the safest spot in the Universe. He is the place we go when life gets tough.

### **Christ Is Our Lifelong Refuge from Loneliness**

We are in the midst of the fourth of these twelve hard times when David was alone. He was alone in a crowd sometimes, alone in a cave, alone with a flock—but never away from the presence of the Lord. His insight by God's grace is the theme of each of these Psalms. That is what God's Word addresses--we see the situation, feel David's loneliness and then see the solution God showed him. All of that is recorded for our use in this wonderful book—the Bible!

**David suffers intense loneliness as moves to a new location not by choice, and under duress.** In First Samuel 21:11 as he fled from Saul to the Philistine city of Gath, David wrote *Psalms 56, 34 and 70*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in a foreign situation.

When we are desperate God is not. When we are alone—God is there. When we are troubled—God is a very present refuge and help for us to flee into His waiting arms.

**God loves to be needed, sought, and asked to help.** Think of all the times in life you go to places with a struggle in your heart; that is exactly what David felt.

Now what are the details of Psalm 56?

- **David was all alone.** No army (they start joining him according to I Samuel 22 after Gath), no family, no friends, nothing.
- **David was desperate.** What type of fear would make someone run away from home and into the hometown of the very person you killed in public, before thousands of witnesses.
- **David was afraid.** He had made a mistake. And now all alone he walks into Gath; he walks in with the accent of a Hebrew from Judea; he walks in holding the only sword in existence that was quite like this one, held by Gath's champion Goliath—and they spotted him, caught him, and now are imprisoning him. Psalm 34 was written after this event; Psalm 56 is during the event.

Next, turn back to **Psalm 34**. What is the back drop for this Psalm? When we compare the details of 1 Sam. 21:13-15 with the record in Psalm 34: v. 13 So he changed his behavior before them, feigned madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard. 14 Then Achish said to his servants, "Look, you see the man is insane. Why have you brought him to me? 15 "Have I need of madmen, that you have brought this [fellow] to play the madman in my presence? Shall this [fellow] come into my house?" (NKJV), we can see the exact context of this Psalm. In First Samuel 22:1 as he fled from Gath and the Philistines, David wrote *Psalm 34*.

Stand with me as we read Psalm 34 and then pray!

### **Like David We Need to Glorify God in Every Situation**

**Psalm 34** A Psalm of David when he pretended madness before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed.

Psalm 34:1 I will bless the LORD at all times [*the Lord was his delight*]; His praise [shall] continually [be] in my mouth. 2 My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; The humble shall hear [of it] and be glad.

Psalm 34:3 Oh, magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together. [*he gives glory to God*]

Psalm 34:4 I sought the LORD, [*even in tough times he always sought for God*] and He heard me, And delivered me from all my fears. 5 They looked to Him and were radiant, And their faces were not ashamed.

Psalm 34:6 This poor man cried out, [*During tough times he had a proper view of himself; he was poor in spirit as Christ would later say.*] and the LORD heard [him,] And saved him out of all his troubles. 7 The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, And delivers them.

- When we are weak and admit it—God can help us. If we stay like the Laodiceans and say to our selves that we are in “need of nothing” God won’t help us.
- Remember in Genesis 32 how Jacob wanted God’s blessing? What did God do before He would bless him? Jacob had to be broken. God will never bless the flesh; God never blesses the proud who are confident in their own abilities, caught up in their own plans and schemes.
- Jacob wants to use God just like he used his brother Esau to get what he wanted; just like he used his father Isaac to get what he wanted; just like he used his father in law Laban to get what he wanted—now Jacob wants to use God to get what he wanted.
- God will not be used. God will not bless the schemes of the proud and their confidence of their abilities. God will break us instead. And that is what He did to Jacob. He crippled him until all Jacob could do is hold on to God. And like David say, “This poor man cried....” There is no limit to what God can do with a needy person who cries out to Him.
- What does James tell us? James 4:10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Psalm 34:8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD [is] good; [*He had a personal experience of God*] Blessed [is] the man [who] trusts in Him!

Psalm 34:9 Oh, fear the LORD, [*During tough times he practiced the presence of God, acknowledging Him is to fear him. it changed his behavior. If we believe right we will behave right!*] you His saints! [There is] no want to those who fear Him. 10 The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good [thing.] 11 Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. 12 Who [is] the man [who] desires life, And loves [many] days, that he may see good? 13 Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit. 14 Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it.

Psalm 34:15 The eyes of the LORD [are] on the righteous, [*During tough times he knew he was in touch with God*] And His ears [are open] to their cry. 16 The face of the LORD [is] against those who do evil, To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. 17 [The righteous] cry out, and the LORD hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles. 18 The LORD [is] near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit. 19 Many [are] the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all. 20 He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken. 21 Evil shall slay the wicked, And those who hate the righteous shall be condemned.

Psalm 34:22 The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, And none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned. [*During tough times the cross is the ultimate refuge*] (NKJV)

David turned, trusted, and triumphed—that is his pattern. Whether it was the family conflicts and dangers that left him all alone, or this job loss—he always turned to God, trusts in His promises, and is led in triumph. That kind of echoes a New Testament verse we all know doesn't it?

2 Corinthians 2:14 Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.

Are you a fragrance at the unemployment office for Christ or not for Christ? Can people tell you are turning to God or to despair? Can your wife see you are trusting God or panicking? Does God see you being led in triumph or sinking in pity? Remember we can't change most of our circumstances—but we can change our attitude in them!

What happens when we don't have the Lord to turn to? A classic example is found in the life of one of the most well known hymn writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Orphaned at 6 by the death of his mother, William Cowper was from a grand British family. His grand uncle was the prime minister of Britain in its greatest hour, his family was well off. But sent to boarding school and being small, young, and weak—William was mercilessly hounded and preyed upon by older boys. Bullied to the point of depression, William grew up in the shadows of life. In his youth he attempted to hang himself, failed, and then lost his mind over the guilt of thinking he had committed the unpardonable sin. After years in the insane asylum he came to Christ in 1764 at the age of 33. Soon he was taken in by John Newton. They became life long best of friends. William struggled to his last day with crippling depression, but that never stopped him from writing hymns. You know his best one. It is page #196, "There Is A Fountain Filled With Blood."

David could have been overcome with fear and grief and despair—but God held him up. In latter life David looked back on these times and wrote another Psalm, lets turn there next.

## **A Refuge for the Abandoned**

### **COR: Message Twelve (050814AM)**

Everything was going so well for so long—Goliath, worship leader for the king, warrior, king's cabinet, king's son-in-law and then everything fell apart!

Christ is our Refuge—but not if we can't see His open arms.

Sometimes, in the lives of some believers, there comes a point so low that we actually feel that everyone—even God, has abandoned us. That is where we find David in Psalm 13. Let's open there this morning.

We are right in the middle of our look at Christ Our Refuge. In Psalm 13 we will see that Christ can't be our refuge if we don't hear His invitation to flee to Him. Christ can't be our refuge if we don't even remember He is there. And sometimes we have to hit bottom, or go through dark waters, or face incredible convulsions in our lives to see Him—even though He's been there all the time.

I learned that lesson deeply at 27,000 feet. Flying home a couple of years ago from Shepherds Conference in LA gave me an insight I'll never forget. Having flown enough to have heard the safety lecture at the preflight prep time dozens of times, I usually am reading and ignore it all, never thinking about anything other than what I need to do before we land.

This particular flight was non-eventful. I had an empty seat beside me that became my desk and as the world slowly drifted by out the window I worked. After a bit, clouds began to darken the sky and I had to turn on the light to see--but I just kept studying. Then a reminder to fasten seatbelts was ordinary and uncommon.

But all of a sudden I started listening when the plane did the first roller coaster move. Then I paid attention. Soon we were dropping, and then going straight up like an elevator. Then a real hard jolt knocked open a few overhead compartments and things fell out, and there were some scattered cries of fear.

From that moment on all I thought about was--who exactly was up front flying this plane? How much experience do they have? How skilled are they in thunderstorm management? What tremendous lesson did I learn about flying? We don't pay much attention to it if all goes smoothly.

Who ever even thinks about the pilot until the weather gets rough? Until the world around us jolts, jumps, rocks and swerves—then all of a sudden that is all we think about. Who is steering this careening machine? Suddenly we realize how important the pilot really is, and that our life is in their hands.

The same is true in life. The fewer bumps, the more we ignore the pilot. The smoother the ride, the more we forget the One in whose hands is our life. But let the rough family times come, the roller coaster ride of our emotions, the crash of our finances, or the sudden plummet of our health—then we think about the pilot.

As we continue in our Christ Our Refuge Series, we are looking at loneliness. We are tracking David's life recorded in the Scriptures and matching up the Psalms he wrote from each event. This allows us to see all the ways he experienced loneliness and how the Lord rescued him from all his troubles.

This morning we look at one of David's deepest trials. We are past the terrible situation in Gath before Achish the king that we saw last time in Psalm 34. Remember how David was so alone and afraid that he acted crazy? After the Lord rescued him from Gath, David flees to the wilderness and goes to live in a cave.

During this cave experience—David goes through a time of feeling abandoned by God. But in that dark hour he finds hope. Why? Because as we keep seeing in God's Word —troubles, trials, tests, and temptations always pushed David towards the Lord. God was his choice, God was his habit, God was his desire because--David supremely loved the Lord with all his heart. These dark times just surfaced the reality that down deep in his soul--David had entrusted his life to the Lord.

That is exactly the way life was for David—the more his life was shaken, the more he thought about and entrusted his life to the Lord. The Psalms we open this morning are David's confessions about who was flying his plane through the turbulent and stormy skies of his life—even when he felt abandoned he found that God was still there flying him through life.

As you turn to **Psalm 13** with me, think about feelings of abandonment. As a pastor, biblical counselor, and a follower of Christ for over forty years—I am convinced that feelings of abandonment are very common even among believers.

Listen again to David's opening words in **Psalm 13:1-2**

1 How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?

2 How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?

- What are some common causes of cave times, feelings of being abandoned by others and even God? Here are just a few doorways that can lead us to stand in David's shoes over and over again through life.
- Cave times may start sometimes through a protracted illness that just seems to never end, and strength never comes, and future plans fade and so does hope.
- Another doorway to a cave is a sudden loss of income and job, then financial needs that become tangled, growing and seemingly hopeless.
- Other doorways to cave times can be through our marriages and families. Wayward children cause immeasurable pain to believing parents, as does an alcoholic spouse, or unsaved family members.
- Our work may open us to the dark times through a demanding and unreasonable boss, or a grueling and unending schedule, or a jealous, spiteful, and injurious co-worker.

Usually these times make us feel that no one really cares about us, then a feeling of being abandoned by others, then starts the spiral downward into thinking that God has also abandoned us.

As we examine Psalm 13 closely, David take us through his depths. David feels abandoned—so abandoned that he cries out as if he is not going to make it.

Amazingly there is little said or written in Christian literature about helping believers who feel abandoned by God. Even the classic work by D. Martin Lloyd Jones called *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cures* doesn't even cover this topic.[1]

"Why do you suppose this is? I think it is because we have been taught that Christians are not to experience such things, that we are only to have "life more abundantly" or to "live victoriously." ... the dying French atheist Voltaire...said, "I am abandoned by God and man."

We are not surprised to hear an unbeliever say that. But if any of us should admit to such feelings, many of our friends would look askance at us, shake their heads, and wonder whether we are Christians. Isn't that true? Isn't that the chief reason why you do not talk to other Christians about this or about many other problems?"[2]

Well, thankfully for all of us who have ever struggled--David talks. Aren't we glad that a spiritual giant like David doesn't cover up his struggles and hide his feelings when they are bad. He doesn't mind being thought weak, failing, or troubled. He just cries out.

This is David the Psalmist, David the spiritual giant, David the king God chose, David the man God says is after His own heart—and that David is unashamed to bare his dark struggles of the soul for all to see.

Let's watch him in Psalm 13 as he bares his soul at his deepest, darkest hour of loneliness—when even God is far away!

Please stand with me and hear David's cry of abandonment in Psalm 13.

For a moment turn back with me to First Samuel 21-22 and get our bearings.

But before we head into the group event of all those men who flock to David—we will catch him all alone.

David wrote more Psalms during this time--than at any other time in his life. These *cave Psalms are 4, 13, 40, 57, 70, 141-142*—lessons on how to overcome the feelings of loneliness and abandonment when we are far from help, or away from home and feel unable to go on.

David is abandoned and dejected in Psalm 13. In the first two verses he expresses the depths of his soul in four cries of anguish. Each cry is a figure of speech called *erotesis*—asking questions without waiting for or even expecting an answer. This is often a sign of deep emotional struggles.

These four cries are also representing a second form of speech called *anaphora*—when the same word is repeated at the beginning of successive sentences. So listen as David cries in anguish

four times, asking God “How long”; and he does so without even pausing because he is so overcome with sorrow, grief, and feeling so alone and abandoned.

*Psalm 13:1-2 **How long**, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? **How long** will You hide Your face from me? 2 **How long** shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart daily? **How long** will my enemy be exalted over me?*

These opening words reveal four areas of David’s life that were deeply wounded. His confessions sometimes strike a chord in our own hearts if we listen carefully.

1. **My life feels like an endless struggle.** *Psalm 13:1a **How long**, O Lord? Will You forget me forever?*

David is abandoned and dejected. Everyone has left him, he is hunted by his own family, his own people, his own fellow people of God, and is threatened by his enemies and now steps into a bleak desert region. David feels with every fiber of his humanity dejected and abandoned.

One commentator writes, “Well must David have understood what this was, when, hunted by Saul, he knew not where to betake himself, at one time seeking refuge among the Moabites, at another in the wilderness of Ziph; now an outlaw hiding himself in the cave of Adullam, and Anon a captain in the service of the King of the Philistines; and amid all his projects haunted by the mournful conviction, 'I shall now one day perish by the hand of Saul.'”[3]

By repeating himself four times he shows how deep this feeling runs.

- **What David says is, “I just can’t go on.”**
2. **My life seems to have lost God’s blessing.** *Psalm 13:1b **How long** will You hide Your face from me?*

David saw a lack of the apparent blessing of God. He says nothing is like it used to be. Every part of my life is troubled and seems to suffer from a lack of Your blessing. Think about what that feels like in our lives:

- **My family doesn’t seem blessed anymore.** The early joys of newlywedded life can fade as the reality of personality differences stress the relationship. Has God ceased to bless our marriage? Those quiet, smiling children sometimes grow into selfish and rebellious youths. The joy of home life is replaced with the tension of confrontation, correction, and sorrow. Has God ceased to bless our family?
- **My work doesn’t seem blessed anymore.** The early days of idealism, creativity, boundless energy, leading to growth and success in your career is replaced with constant obstacles and personal stagnation. Has God ceased to bless my work?
- **My ministry doesn’t seem blessed anymore.** The spring in my step is gone, my feet feel like lead as I cross the parking lot to serve in AWANA, or youth ministry, or the choir, or orchestra, or teach Sunday School, or join in at my flock. The joy and sense of purpose are gone. Has God ceased to bless my ministry?

- ***My spiritual life doesn't seem blessed anymore.*** The Word is stale, my singing is lifeless, coming to worship is drudgery, my sins feel unforgiven, my past is coming back to haunt me, I feel stained, I feel distant, I feel like no one, even God, cares about my soul. Has God ceased to bless me?
  - ***What David says is, "I don't SEE YOU anymore in my home, my work, or my life."***
3. **My mind seems so troubled.** *Psalm 13:2a How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart daily?*

David said that he had dark thoughts and uncontrolled emotions. He loved the Lord, but all of the stress of the terrible plight he was in had drained him of all peace and joy.

David had what is a common experience. He was swept away by his emotions. He couldn't calmly reflect on the faithful hand of God in the past and feel the comfort of trusting the future to Him. He had ruminated so long on disaster after disaster he was feeding on dark thoughts of hopelessness. There are often several clear causes for these feelings David confesses.

- ***Emotional Temperament.*** David was probably of the temperament that was more prone to discouragement. As Lloyd Jones writes in the opening pages of his monumental book, "**foremost** among all causes of spiritual depression is **temperament**" [4]
- ***Physical Weakness.*** "A plunge into disquieting thoughts and emotions can be caused by physical factors—illness, for example. Charles Haddon Spurgeon was one of the greatest evangelical leaders of the last century, but he suffered from severe bouts of depression. Why? The main reason is that he suffered from gout, marked by painful inflammation of the joints and an excess of uric acid in the blood. It was common in the last century, and it drained Spurgeon's energies".[5] Just like David when he was hungry and tired we can always beware of times of extreme fatigue and physical weakness as an open door for the Devil or our flesh to try to push us down.
- ***Let down.*** Another weak time is often following great events. Jesus always retreated from the crowds after big events like the feeding of the five thousand and preaching campaigns. He needed extra time alone with God to refresh and renew His life. Elijah came down from the mountaintop literally, in I Kings 18-19 and got so low he was ready to die. God took him off to a quiet place, fed him, rested him, and met with him. Always remember what James says, "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months" (James 5:17). If Elijah, David, and Jesus needed to exercise care to protect themselves from weaknesses—so should we not be surprised when they come.
- ***What David says is, "I can't stop these feelings of dejection and abandonment."***

4. **My life seems to have lost God's victory.** *Psalm 13:2b How long will my enemy be exalted over me?*

David says, its no use. Saul is going to win. He has all the troops, resources, and time he needs. He will end up destroying me.

- Most of us probably do not have literal human enemies, at least not serious enemies. But if you are a Christian, you do have one great spiritual enemy who is worse than any human enemy imaginable. This is the devil, whom the apostle Peter compared to “a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). [6]
- Lloyd-Jones says of this foe, “The devil [is] the adversary of our souls. He can use our temperaments and our physical condition. He so deals with us that we allow our temperament to control and govern us, instead of keeping temperament where it should be kept. There is no end to the ways the devil produces spiritual depression. We must always bear him in mind.” [7]
- ***What David says is, “I am constantly defeated.”***

How did David survive this time? Aren’t you glad he wrote it all down for us? I wonder if David ever thought that his hard times would be such a blessing to us *three thousand years later*?

David decided he would not live in the pits. So he looks up and talks to the Lord. David is rescued. How did that happen? The turning point was prayer. Listen to the poet:

When all things seem against us,

To drive us to despair,

We know one gate is open

One ear will hear our prayer.[8]

*Psalm 13:3-6 Consider and hear me, O Lord my God; Enlighten my eyes, Lest I sleep the sleep of death; 4 Lest my enemy say, “I have prevailed against him”; Lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved. 5 But I have trusted in Your mercy; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. 6 I will sing to the Lord, Because He has dealt bountifully with me.*

David cries out in this prayer to the Lord for three things, and that is what God wanted to hear. He answers and David goes on.

- First David prays--**look at me**. *Psalm 13:3a Consider and hear me, O Lord my God; Enlighten my eyes, Lest I sleep the sleep of death;* David felt like God had turned His back on him. He asks the Lord to turn around and look at him. When I am overwhelmed at times one of the most touching moments is when my sweet Bonnie finds me. She sits down and talks, when I don’t respond, she says “Look at me honey,” and gently puts her hand under my chin and lifts my face up to look at her eyes of love and smile of comfort.
- Second David prays--**answer me**. *Psalm 13:3b Consider and hear me, O Lord my God; Enlighten my eyes, Lest I sleep the sleep of death.* David felt like God had stopped talking to him. This Hebrew word literally means ‘answer’. David is asking the Lord to let Him hear His voice like in the old days. This is when we take God's Word and say “Open Your Word to my heart again. Let me cling to Your truth. Help my unbelief!”
- Finally David prays—**restore me**. *Psalm 13:3c Consider and hear me, O Lord my God; Enlighten my eyes, Lest I sleep the sleep of death.* David felt that he was going to die and

never be king. He asks God to do what he promised. This is when we say to the Lord, “You promised to never leave me—I need Your presence again! You told me that you loved me to the uttermost—I need Your power again. You said that you would comfort me—I need Your peace again!

One parting truth we can hold on to as we go--

**To be abandoned means once you were not.** For the true child of God there is always some awareness of this truth, regardless of how deep his or her depression may be. We may be depressed even to the point of feeling utterly abandoned. But the fact that we feel abandoned itself means that we really know God is there. To be abandoned you need somebody to be abandoned by. Because we are Christians and have been taught by God in Scripture, we know that God still loves us and will be faithful to us, regardless of our feelings.[9]

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[1] D. Martin Lloyd Jones, *Spiritual Depression:Its Causes and Cure* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965).

[2] James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms—An Expository Commentary—Volume 1—Psalms 1-41*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998, p. 106.

[3] J. J. Stewart Perowne, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 2 volumes in 1 (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989), 1:181. Original edition 1878-1879..

[4] D. Martin Lloyd Jones, *Spiritual Depression:Its Causes and Cure* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 14.

[5] James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms—An Expository Commentary—Volume 1—Psalms 1-41*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998, p. 109.

[6] James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms—An Expository Commentary—Volume 1—Psalms 1-41*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998, p. 110.

[7] D. Martin Lloyd Jones, *Spiritual Depression:Its Causes and Cure* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 19.

[8] James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms—An Expository Commentary—Volume 1—Psalms 1-41*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998, p. 110.

[9] James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms—An Expository Commentary—Volume 1—Psalms 1-41*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998, p. 111.

## Just As I Am

### COR: Message Thirteen (050814PM)

Christ is our refuge we can flee to Him at any time and in any condition—and He will never turn anyone away. In a pitiful muddy mess David trudges to the Lord. Like the buddies on their way back from digging along the creek, head to toe in mud—David came just like he was to the Lord.

David here in Psalm 40 cries out in his need to the Lord and says what we all should say—we are dirty sinners by the standard of our Holy God and can only come to Him as we acknowledge and confess that truth. Then and only then can He take us in.

There was an old expression when I was growing up that described someone who was down emotionally, they'd say that they were "in the pits" That meant that things weren't going well.

This Psalm can reflect any of the pits that David had lived through, and there were many. So it is possible to see him speaking of any era of his life—and maybe even of all of them! David was painfully aware of his own failures, weaknesses, shortcomings, and sins. He likens them to a pit and salvation as well as sanctification being lifted out of those pits all through life.

How we need to recognize today that it is *sinful* to think that we are better than someone else and to look down upon others. It does not matter who they are--before God they are on the same plane as we are. We are all sinners and need to come to the Cross and accept Christ as our Savior.

The humble approach we need when we come to Jesus was beautifully seen in the story behind one of the best known hymns in America. It was in London when a great preacher by the name of Caesar Milan was invited one evening to a very large and prominent home where a choice musical was to be presented.

The musician was Charlotte Elliott born in Clapham, England, on March 18, 1789. As a young person she had lived a carefree life, gaining popularity as a portrait artist, musician and writer of humorous verse.

Now at thirty, her health began to fail rapidly, and soon she would become a bedridden invalid for the remaining years of her life. With her failing health came great feelings of despondency. The visit that night by the noted Swiss evangelist, Dr. Caesar Malan, proved to be a turning point in Charlotte's life[1]. Charlotte thrilled the audience with her singing and playing. When she finished, the evangelist threaded his way through the crowd which was gathered around her.

When he finally came to her and had her attention, he said, "Young lady, when you were singing, I sat there and thought how tremendously the cause of Christ would be benefited if you would dedicate yourself and your talents to the Lord.

But," he added, "you are just as much a sinner as the worst drunkard in the street, or any harlot on Scarlet Street. But I am glad to tell you that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, will cleanse you from all sin if you will come to Him." In a very haughty manner, she turned her head aside and said to him, "You are very insulting, sir." And she started to walk away. He said, "Lady, I did not mean any offense, but I pray that the Spirit of God will convict you."

Well, they all went home, and that night this young woman could not sleep. At two o'clock in the morning she knelt at the side of her bed and took Christ as her Savior. And then she, Charlotte Elliott, sat down and, while sitting there, wrote the words of a favorite hymn "Just As I Am":

*Just as I am, without one plea,  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come!*

*Just as I am, and waiting not  
To rid my soul of one dark blot,  
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,  
O Lamb of God, I come!*

*Just as I am, tho' tossed about  
With many a conflict, many a doubt,  
Fightings and fears within, without,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

*Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind—  
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,  
Yea, all I need in Thee to find—  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

*And then the final stanza:  
Just as I am—Thou wilt receive,  
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;  
Because Thy promise I believe,  
O Lamb of God, I come!*

My friend, may I say to you, that this is the basis on which all of us must come to Christ.[2]

Throughout the remainder of her life, Miss Elliott celebrated every year the day on which her Swiss friend had led her to a personal relationship with Christ, for she considered it to be her

spiritual birthday. Although she did not publish this hymn until 1836, fourteen years after her conversion experience, it is apparent that she never forgot the words of her friend, for they form the very essence of this hymn.[3]

David came just as he was to the One who alone could help him. Lets read this wonderful Psalm before we pray. Psalm 40.

There are portions of Scripture that need substantial introductions, because they are not well known, and there are sections that need very little introduction, because they are. Psalm 40 is in the second category. It tells of a man who was stuck in a slimy pit, bogged down in mud and mire, but then was rescued by God, who set his feet on a rock and gave him a firm place to stand. That man was King David.

Perhaps that is the most important thing to say at the beginning of this study. I remind you that David was the beloved king of Israel, who reigned powerfully and well for forty years. He was installed, blessed, and approved by God, who called him “a man after his own heart” (1Sam. 13:14). David was nearly always in close fellowship with God, and he wrote almost half of the psalms. By his writings and by his common speech he regularly and faithfully proclaimed the grace of God to others. Yet in Psalm 40 he describes himself as having been mired down in a pit from which he was unable to escape.

*[Psalm 40 is] ... the truth that muddy times may be the experience even of the greatest saints and slimy pits the lot even of kings and preachers. [4]*

Here are the various pits that may be alluded to:

- **The pit of sin.** This could be on David’s mind as he remembered Bathsheba. Remember how David decided to stay home while he as King was supposed to be leading the army. While enjoying his palace in Jerusalem he looked down into the courtyard of a nearby house where the grand- daughter of his aged counselor Ahithophel the Gilonite (II Samuel 15:12) lived were her husband the great warrior of King David, Uriah the Hittite. David had noticed her beauty at other occasions but this evening seeing her unclothed drew him to allow his lusts to plunge him into sin. The rest is so sadly known from 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 11.

Maybe you are caught in a similar sin. Maybe one sin has led you to another and you are hopelessly mired in the pit of sin. That is the nature of sin. Sin is a powerful monster that entraps all who play with it. While captivated by sin there is no end to what you may do. If you are in the pit of sin there is help available—God is in the business of rescuing us from sin. Flee to Him, cry to Him from your pit and let Him pull you out and put your feet on the Rock.

- **The pit of defeat.** This could be Saul in David’s mind. It was so hard. Saul could never be pleased no matter how hard David tried; or maybe it was Saul’s bitter hatred and jealousy at David’s success that defeated David; or even the bitter agony and defeat of David’s own son Absalom’s betrayal and attempt to destroy his father left David in despair. What ever pulled David into the pit of defeat—God could rescue him.

- **The pit of bad habits.** We all have to mortify our proud flesh, when David didn't he may have thought of his defeat in numbering the people. William James, in his classic Principles of Psychology, put it this way:

Could the young but realize how soon they will become mere walking bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct while in the plastic state. We are spinning our own fates, good or evil, and never to be undone. Every smallest stroke of virtue or vice leaves its ever so little scar. The drunken Rip Van Winkle, in Jefferson's play, excuses himself for every fresh dereliction by saying, "I won't count this time! " Well! He may not count it, but it is being counted nonetheless. Down among his nerve cells and fibers the molecules are counting it, registering and storing it up to be used against him when the next temptation comes. Nothing we ever do is, in strict scientific literalness, wiped out. Of course, this has its good side as well as its bad one.[5]

- **The pit of circumstances.** If anyone could wallow in the despair of having all the worst of circumstances, David sure could. When he wasn't running from Saul, he was fleeing his own country men, or the Philistines and everything in between. But when ever we think of hard circumstances look at Paul's. Turn to 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11:24-28; 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 4:9-13; 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 6:4-10.

2 Corinthians 11:24-28 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— 28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

1 Corinthians 4:9-13 For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. 10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! 11 To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. 12 And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; 13 being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.

2 Corinthians 6:4-10 But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, 5 in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; 6 by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, 7 by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, 8 by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; 9 as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; 10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

1. **DAVID REVIEWED GOD’S WORK IN HIS LIFE.** Notice five actions that God directed toward David—turned, noticed, heard, lifted, and set: *Psalm 40:1-3 I waited patiently for the Lord; And **He inclined** to me, And **heard** my cry. 2 He also **brought me up** out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And **set my feet** upon a rock, And **established** my steps. 3 He has put a new song in my mouth— Praise to our God; Many will see it and fear, And will trust in the Lord.*

2. **DAVID REAFFIRMED HIS TRUST IN GOD.** Psalm 40:4-5 Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust, And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. 5 Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works Which You have done; And Your thoughts toward us Cannot be recounted to You in order; If I would declare and speak of them, They are more than can be numbered.

3. **DAVID RENEWED HIS SUBMISSION TO GOD.** Psalm 40:6-8 Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; **My ears You have opened.** Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. 7 Then I said, “Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me. 8 I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart.”

Opened ears is the key to submission to God. This is a dual analogy. First, the Hebrew word literally means “to dig out”. Notice the other times it is used:

*Genesis 50:5 'My father made me swear, saying, “Behold, I am dying; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me.” Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father, and I will come back.’ ”*

*Numbers 21:18 **The well** the leaders sank, **Dug** by the nation’s nobles, By the lawgiver, with their staves.” And from the wilderness they went to Mattanah,*

This is a picture of clearing things out of the way so that the water can flow into the well and to make room for something in the grave. So David says you dug my ears.

- **Like the well**--You took everything out of my life painful as it was, in these lonely times, so that I could hear your voice clearly and your water could flow into my life.
- **Like the grave**—you dug things out of my life so that there was room for you to fill my life. A grave was where they laid what was dearest to them on earth. God is through excruciating times making room in my life to deposit something special.

What a beautiful way to look at hard times. God is tunneling a well of water to refresh me; God is making room to bury into my life His greatest treasures. But that is not all that David shares with us from this time in the pits. There is another exciting picture for us of submission to God.

The second way that David uses this word is to look back at an ancient Mosaic ritual. When slaves had worked their term of service and it was time to be free they were released to start out on their own. But if the slaves loved their master and their work, they could request a lifetime servitude. This is covered in a fascinating ritual recorded in:

Exodus 21:1-6 “Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them: 2 If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. 3 If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. 4 If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master’s, and he shall go out by himself. 5 But if the servant plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ 6 then his master shall **bring him to the judges**. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall **pierce his ear** with an awl; and he shall **serve him forever**. (public, painful, and permanent)

For us this side of the cross here is such a moving picture of what God wants from us. He invites us to become His Bondslaves, servants for life. If we are willing and so desire we declare that publicly like Paul does so often. “I want to serve the Lord all my days”. Then we make some painful choices in life to limit our flesh, discipline our life, invest in the world to come instead of merely in this world. And when we make that offering of our lives that is reflected in Romans 12, it is a permanent service that goes through life and lasts forever.

*Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present (aorist infinitive—‘remain in the state of) your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed (present imperative ‘do not allow yourself to get squashed’) to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

*Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

**4. DAVID REPEATED TRUTHS ABOUT GOD**—He is Righteous. Psalm 40:9-10 I have proclaimed the good news of **righteousness** In the great assembly; Indeed, I do not restrain my lips, O Lord, You Yourself know. 10 I have not hidden Your **righteousness** within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your loving kindness and Your truth From the great assembly.

As David looked back over his life of loneliness, desperation, sorrow and fear—he saw one truth most clearly, God is Righteous. The key New Testament book on righteousness is Romans—mentioned 66 times we see God’s righteousness and our need of it. In Romans Paul declares that God is righteous in the four key areas that matter for eternity:

- God is righteous in declaring us as hopeless in our **sin (1-2)**;
- God is righteous in providing for our **salvation (3-5, 9-11)**;
- God is righteous in demanding our **sanctification (6-8)**;

- God is righteous in bestowing gifts **for our service (12-16)**.

So David's life testifies to God's righteousness. God is always faithful and what He does is right! So David says God is righteous.

- ❖ God is righteous in my: Perilous years when I was a fugitive;
- ❖ God is righteous in my: Prosperous years when I was victorious in every battle and sat upon the Throne;
- ❖ God is righteous in my: Punitive years when I sinned and God had to chasten me;
- ❖ God is righteous in my: Peaceful years when I gathered treasures to build the Temple.

Troubles—yes; pessimism—no! Poor and needy—always! That is how I came, that is how I come, and You remain the same Oh Lamb of God! For a moment turn back with me to First Samuel 21-22 and get our bearings. But before we head into the group event of all those men who flock to David—we will catch him all alone.

David wrote more Psalms during this time--than at any other time in his life. These *cave Psalms are 4, 13, 40, 57, 70, 141-142*—lessons on how to overcome the feelings of loneliness and abandonment when we are far from help, or away from home and feel unable to go on.

I wonder have you ever felt prehistoric? And I know if you've watched television very much you've seen the conditions of what cave men look like. For them life reduced to grunts and groans. And life is an endless pursuit of nothingness at times. I like the way Edna St. Vincent Mallay put it a few years ago she said: "life must go on . . . I just can't remember why".

That's what I'm talking about--- a cave man sort of existence. A life when a vicious swirl of getting up, going to work out of the home or in the home if you're a mom--- dropping into bed exhausted at the end of the day only to find out that the entire month has gone by and falling further behind instead of ahead. That's the kind of life that I'm talking about and it's not foreign to most of us. We know what it's like; we know what it's like when it's hard.

### **Christ is our Lifelong Refuge from Loneliness.**

In I Samuel 22 where we will come to the fifth of the twelve severe times in David's life portrayed in the Psalms.

**David suffers intense loneliness as he feels abandoned while he begins to live and work with a tough crowd.** In First Samuel 22:1-2 as he moved into a cave at Adullam with an incredibly difficult group of men.

David could have been overcome with fear and grief and despair—but God held him up. In latter life David looked back on these times and wrote another Psalm, let's turn there next.

David had found a place he could always reach for safety and security—in any situation. The Lord was his refuge; the Lord is our refuge also. Christ our refuge is the safest spot in the Universe. He is the place we go when life gets tough.

**Psalm 70** is the final Psalm from this time in David's life. It is reflective as he looks back on this time and shares the Lord!

Psalm 70:1-5 Make haste, O God, to deliver me! Make haste to help me, O Lord! 2 Let them be ashamed and confounded Who seek my life; Let them be turned back and confused Who desire my hurt. 3 Let them be turned back because of their shame, Who say, "Aha, aha!" 4 ***Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; And let those who love Your salvation say continually, "Let God be magnified!"*** 5 But I am poor and needy; Make haste to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay.

Some practical steps to overcome loneliness are these:

- ***Cry to God when life is hollow.*** Life was so bad at this time that David says four times in verses 1, 5—make haste, come now, don't wait, hasten. He says Lord I am not going to make it in this job, this marriage, this family, this sickness, this disaster. Quickly come, I am sinking and am going to perish.
- ***Live with mysteries.*** We can't always know why God is allowing circumstances—but we do know we can trust Him to do all things well. Jesus said to His disciples in John 13:7, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this."
- ***Accept your situation.*** What is unchangeable must be accepted and lived through by God's grace. As Paul said, we must echo, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13)
- ***Don't be surprised by troubles.*** For a moment think who this is—David the man after God's heart. David the one Jesus is named after "Son of David" – and he had such a difficult life. Come to think of it, so did Moses, and Elijah, and Paul, and Peter—in fact, they all seem to have a hard life. If we look to the end of this Psalm we find in the conclusion the real goal God has for us. Real victory in life is not evading and escaping the majority of troubles that head our way. No, it is to seek that God be exalted through my life what ever He chooses to do with me and all my hard times.

***Though we at times are desperate—God is not.*** He knows what is coming before it ever starts. God is managing every detail. What does David do in verse 4? He prays for others who sought God. What does that say to us? When we are alone and struggling it is the perfect time to pray for others who may be going through what we are facing. Here is a simple plan we can remember:

- Are you sick? Then pray for others who are sick—you know what they are going through!
- Are you abused by co-workers, family members, or classmates? Then pray for others going through the same pains and hurts.
- Are you in a dead end job? Then pray for hope for others that also face the daily struggle of what to do to survive in the days ahead.
- Are you successful and tempted to be selfish? Then pray for others you know who are also experiencing prosperity and ask God to keep them from selfishness and pride.

All of this was intended by God to prepare David for the throne—and how it did. What a great king he was. Like we saw this morning, from God’s creation we can learn a profound lesson. The mother eagle shows its love for its young by destroying their nest. Without this rude and painful start in their lives they would be too comfortable to ever learn to soar. Though they protest loudly the destruction continues until it is too painful to sit on all those sharp sticks—and they take flight. So God allows irritants

One final lesson--the message of Psalm 56, 34 and 70 is summarized in one of Paul’s most repeated exhortations, Philippians 4:6-7. If we could summarize these two verses they would say in the form of two imperatives: “***Worry about nothing; pray about everything!***”

**Psalm 57:4** My soul is among lions; I lie among the sons of men Who are set on fire, Whose teeth are spears and arrows, And their tongue a sharp sword.

What simple lessons can we find in cave times? ***Use lonely times to grow.*** One of the greatest truths we can discover is that lonely times usually accomplish great discoveries about God. David is at the depth of loneliness. He has been on the run for years and now he is hiding in a desolate cave in a crowd of malcontents, feeling very much alone. He has two choices. Stay in the cave of loneliness, descend into self-pity and sin or look up and use the time alone to grow.

Guess what David does? **Psalm 142:5-7** is the answer.

As we look there, why don’t you take a moment and mark these for someone else who may need them someday. Or even for you if you ever feel the twinge of loneliness in your life. Look now and find:

- When alone I learn that You alone are my true REFUGE. Psalm 142:5a: ***loneliness means its time to flee to your Refuge.*** I will believe Your promise and turn to You as my Refuge right now.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true PORTION. Psalm 142:5b: ***loneliness means its time to feed on your Portion.*** I will believe Your promise to be all I need in this hard time.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true LISTENER. Psalm 142:6 'Give heed my cry': ***loneliness means its time to speak to your Master.*** I will believe Your promise and pour out all my troubles to You who care for me.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true DELIVERER "bring" Psalm 142:7a: ***loneliness means its time to trust in your Redeemer.*** I will believe Your promise and let You rescue me now.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true OBJECT OF WORSHIP Psalm 142:7b: ***loneliness means its time to adore your Lord.*** I will believe Your promise and worship You even when I don’t feel like it.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true PROVIDER “surround” Psalm 142:7c: ***loneliness means its time to rest in His Sufficient Provision.*** I will believe Your promise and let You surround me now with everything I need.

So again we ask ourselves—is Christ my refuge? Is that a personal chosen reality or just a fact I’ve heard? God will rock your boat just to see what you will do. Loneliness is a tool to glorify God, to turn and trust and triumph, and to make some great discoveries about God.

- Are you feeling the loneliness of youth? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of life facing family conflict and danger? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of job loss, and family separation? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of moving to a new location that is very foreign to you? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of living and working with a tough crowd? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of unemployment and unsettled home life? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of betrayal by friends? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of being wronged in a business deal? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of the complete loss of your family, friends, and finances? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of temptation and failure? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of chastisement and restoration? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of old age? *Jesus says I am always with you!*

### Put into I Samuel order

1. **David suffers the intense loneliness of unemployment and unsettled home life.** In First Samuel 22:5 and 23:14-16 as he was hiding from Saul in the Wilderness of Hareth, David takes time to write ***Psalms 17 and 63***—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are insecure. This was a time of no sure place to live, no reliable source of income and provision.

2. **David suffers the intense loneliness when betrayed by friends.** In First Samuel 23:10-13 as he escapes from Saul at Keilah and goes into hiding in the mountains of Ziph, David writes ***Psalms 31 and 54***. In First Samuel 24:1-16 after he spares the life of his mortal enemy King Saul, David records his heart in ***Psalms 7***. In First Samuel 23:29 as he hides in the cave at Engedi, David writes ***Psalms 35-36***—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are betrayed.

3. **David suffers the intense loneliness when wronged in business.** In First Samuel 25 in the Wilderness of Paran as he faces the danger of his anger toward Nabal “the fool” and as God delivers him, David writes ***Psalms 53***—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in danger of bitterness.

4. **David suffers the intense loneliness of the complete loss of his family, friends, and finances.** Finally in First Samuel 27 as he is grieved and endangered over the raid on his family and city of Ziklag, David writes *Psalms 16, 38 and 39*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in threat of loss.

5. **David suffers the intense loneliness of temptation and failure.** From the depths of conviction after his fall into sin with Bathsheba in II Samuel 11, David writes *Psalms 32*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are tempted and fail.

6. **David suffers the intense loneliness of chastisement and restoration.** From the pain of chastisement that leads to repentance and restoration in II Samuel 12, David sings of his faithful God in *Psalms 51*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in chastisement and restoration.

### **Finally We Find David's Testimony Of God's Closeness During His Old Age or His Waning Years**

7. **David suffers the intense loneliness of old age.** And finally, at the end of his magnificent life, David extolls his Master and King in *Psalms 18*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in our last days before death. Especially note his life long praise to God in Psalm 18:46 The Lord lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let the God of my salvation be exalted.

Psalm 71 Christ our Refuge in the Loneliness of Weakness and Sickness before Death

Psalm 116 the Christ our Refuge in the Loneliness of Death

- ***We are not lonely at death if we always remember He hears us.*** Psalm 116:1 I love the Lord, because He has heard My voice and my supplications.
- ***We are not lonely at death if we pour out our fears and needs.*** Psalm 116:2 Because He has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live.
- ***We are not lonely at death if we always remember that troubles and sorrows are neither wrong nor avoidable.*** Psalm 116:3 The pains of death surrounded me, And the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. Every great saint since the Garden of Eden (except two) have died in pain of one form or another. Jesus died most painfully. It is not wrong or sinful to have troubles and sorrows—it is normal and also a part of God's plan.
- ***We are not lonely at death if we seek the Lord's aid when life hurts.*** Psalm 116:4 Then I called upon the name of the Lord: "O Lord, I implore You, deliver my soul!"
- ***We are not lonely at death if we praise Him for His mercy and goodness that have followed us all through our life.*** Psalm 116:5-7 Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; Yes, our God is merciful. 6 The Lord preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me. 7 Return to your rest, O my soul, For the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.
- ***We are not lonely at death if we make it a habit to walk with God each day we live.*** Psalm 116:8-10 For You have delivered my soul from death, My eyes from tears, And my feet from falling. 9 I will walk before the Lord In the land of the living. 10 I believed, therefore I spoke, "I am greatly afflicted." The same One who walks through life with us

keeps walking and takes us through the Valley of Death's shadows. And shadows of death are all we get—not death. Jesus said who ever lives and believes in Him will never die.

- ***We are not lonely at death if we drink from the cup of salvation.*** Psalm 116:12-13 What shall I render to the Lord For all His benefits toward me? 13 I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the Lord. Believers never die!
- ***We are not lonely at death if we seek to obey Him during life.*** Psalm 116:14 I will pay my vows to the Lord Now in the presence of all His people. Jesus said His sheep hear His voice, follow Him—and He gives them endless life, even when their body dies!
- ***We are not lonely at death if we serve Him in life.*** Psalm 116:15-16 Precious in the sight of the Lord Is the death of His saints. 16 O Lord, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds. Serving God is what saints are going to be doing forever!
- ***We are not lonely at death if we thank Him through life.*** Psalm 116:17-19 I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, And will call upon the name of the Lord. 18 I will pay my vows to the Lord Now in the presence of all His people, 19 In the courts of the Lord's house, In the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!

### Some practical steps to overcome loneliness are these:

1. ***Deal with sin.*** Be sure that there is no unconfessed or unforsaken sin left in your life to give the Devil a place in your life. (Eph. 4:27)
2. ***Share your burdens.*** Clearly tell the Lord all your fears, all your struggles, all your pains—remember that He knows our frame that we are dust. (Psalm 103)
3. ***Abandon all self-pity.*** Constant self-sorrow is a one way ticket to loneliness. Self-pity denies we have a responsibility to deal with our emotions and thus frustrates any cure. As Jesus said, coming after Him means we deny our self (Luke 9:23).

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[1] Adapted from two different stories of this hymn. The first written by Osbeck, Kenneth W., *101 Hymn Stories*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications) 1997.

[2] Details of Charlotte Elliott's conversion recorded by McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

[3] Osbeck, Kenneth W., *101 Hymn Stories*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications) 1997.

[4] James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms—An Expositional Commentary—Volume 1—Psalms 1-41*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998, p. 346-47.

[5] William James, *Principles of Psychology* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 1952), p. 83.

## Pathway to the Pits COR: Message Fourteen (050821AM)

Fleeing to Christ as our refuge works in no matter what spiritual, physical or emotional state we find ourselves in—throughout all of our lives. This morning in Psalm 40 David confesses for all the world to hear—that he has become stuck in the pits of life. And this Psalm is his fleeing to the Lord for refuge.

If the Psalm stopped there it would be so valuable for us to learn from. We would see how David got there and how he was delivered by the Lord.

But when you add to Psalm 40 the way that Christ and the apostles used this Psalm—now you have something very powerful to us this morning.

The key to Psalm 40 is verses 6-8 because they are our Lord Jesus Christ's marching orders while here on Earth. Now that was not clear to us the reader, until the New Testament was written. Look for a moment at Psalm 40:6-8-- **6 Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. 7 Then I said, "Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me. 8 I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart."**

Who is David talking about? Just about himself or Someone to come, greater than David? We can understand as we look at how the writer of Hebrews applies these verses in Hebrews 10:5-9-- **5 Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. 6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. 7 Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—In the volume of the book it is written of Me—To do Your will, O God.'** " 8 Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law), 9 then He said, "**Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.**" He takes away the first that He may establish the second.

The writer of Hebrews explains that Psalm 40 contains a promise of Christ in the Old Testament. And as Jesus clearly explains to us—this is exactly what He came to DO! God's will was Christ's plan; it was Christ's marching orders that He gladly followed.

And what was Christ's repeatedly stated goal throughout all of His earthly life? Listen to Him speak in the Gospel by John.

- *John 4:34 Jesus said to them, "My food is **to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.***
- *John 5:30 I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because **I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.***
- *John 6:38 For I have come down from heaven, **not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.***
- *John 8:29 And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for **I always do those things that please Him.**"*

And what were Christ's last words of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane that prepared Him for the Cross?

- *Luke 22:42 saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless **not My will, but Yours, be done.**"*

Back to Psalm 40 again please. Look at those key verses 6-8. “My ears You have opened” in Psalm 40:6b in Hebrew is literally “ears” or “two ears You have dug for me.” David is picturing his desire to reflect Christ's coming obedience and dedication. This is a messianic Psalm, a look ahead through David's life at the coming Christ.

David was told by the Spirit of God that this would be Christ's desire—and that is the desire that David embraced, even in the deepest pits of discouragement, depression, despair, and loneliness.

- No matter what **sin tripped him up**—David said I want to do your will. I will obey. I will dedicate my self to do your will.
- No matter what **emotion pushed him down**—David said I want to do your will. I will obey. I will dedicate my self to do your will.
- No matter what **dark thought pierced him through**—David said I want to do your will. I will obey. I will dedicate my self to do your will.
- No matter what **temptation to quit surrounded him**—David said I want to do your will. I will obey. I will dedicate my self to do your will.

Is that where you are this morning? Even if you are in the pits—nothing can keep you there if you desire to do God's will with all your heart.

Lets join him in Psalm 40 as we read just the opening verses of this monumental confession of a caveman, living for God—in the pits!

## The Pathway to The Pit

Now lets look at how David got into the pits before we see how the Lord rescued him. It all started in his mind and emotions.

- **Excited.** Can you imagine how you would feel if you were a military hero who had actually saved an entire army and liberated a nation from military occupation? That describes David's teen age life. His confrontation with Goliath sent shock waves through the entire region. The Philistine army had held Israel in mortal fear by fielding the ultimate weapon—a ten foot tall “Terminator” that could kill any challenger with dread fear by sheer size. David's swift victory stunned and confused the enemy army and led to a resounding victory. But exciting times can fade so fast.
- **Popular.** Can you imagine what it would be like to be the best known musician for an entire nation? That describes David's late teen aged years. He played for the royal events in King Saul's palace. He was known, heard, seen, and sought as a brilliant musician and lyricist. He could write, he could play, and he could sing—and no one else in all of that country could compare to him. But popularity can fade so fast.
- **Secure.** Can you imagine what it would be like to be an undefeated warrior? There is no record of David ever suffering any type of military defeat. He faced much larger armies, much fiercer foes, much greater danger than anyone else in his day—and returned time after time victorious. Soon he was credited as having killed ten times as many enemy soldiers as even the King himself. But security can fade so fast.

- **Happy.** Can you imagine being married to the best known and most beautiful woman in all of the country. That was David's wife, the King's daughter. Add to that being the best known musician, the best known soldier, always undefeated...sounds like everything was going for David. He was on top of the world. He had it all. But happiness can fade so fast.
- **Wham.** And then suddenly everything changed. The king gets angry at him, the job gets terminated, the future plans are all cancelled, the family leaves, the home is abandoned, and life gets so hard David has what we would describe as a complete emotional and mental breakdown. That is Psalm 34 when David acted crazy before Achish King of Gath.

This leads to the dark days. Psalm 13 where we were last time records David at the bottom. He is emotionally, physically, and spiritually exhausted. David is dejected, depressed, discouraged and feels all alone, unwanted, and abandoned. Then he sees the Light—literally. He looks up at the end of Psalm 13 and sees that God is really there and he sings to Him.

But that doesn't instantly change everything. Coming to God or even coming back to God doesn't instantly solve all of our problems—but it does give us the pathway and the solution we need. That is where David finds himself in Psalm 40. He is learning how to live life in the pits, and how to get out of those pits—one step at a time.

Most of us don't know very much about the dark side of life. We avoid it, flee from sin, and try to stay happy, busy and care free. But as we saw last time—David talks about what many of us have felt, and what some of us fear. David bares his soul for all the world to see. And with this amazing confession comes the pathway he followed, the trail out of the dark woods. That is what we need to see and follow today.

The path out of the pits—that would be a great title for this Psalm! If you have ever been in the pits, or know someone who has—listen and learn. This is a Divine gift to us in God's Word!

### **Four Pits God Rescues Us From!**

This Psalm can reflect any of the pits that David had lived through, and there were many. So it is possible to see him speaking of any era of his life—and maybe even of all of them! David was painfully aware of his own failures, weaknesses, shortcomings, and sins. He likens them to a pit and salvation as well as sanctification being lifted out of those pits all through life.

David was nearly always in close fellowship with God, and he wrote almost half of the psalms. By his writings and by his common speech he regularly and faithfully proclaimed the grace of God to others. Yet in Psalm 40 he describes himself as having been mired down in a pit from which he was unable to escape.

*[Psalm 40 is] ... the truth that muddy times may be the experience even of the greatest saints and slimy pits the lot even of kings and preachers. [1]*

What are the pits David was talking about? There are four possibilities drawn from various eras of David's life. Remember, David wrote this after the events. He is looking back with an inspired view of life. God's Spirit within him opened his mind and guided his words. Everything in this Psalm is exactly what the Spirit of God wanted him to say about these times in the pits. Here are the various pits that may be alluded to:

- **The pit of defeat.** This could be Saul in David's mind. It was so hard. Saul could never be pleased no matter how hard David tried; or maybe it was Saul's bitter hatred and jealousy at David's success that defeated David; or even the bitter agony and defeat of David's own son Absalom's betrayal and attempt to destroy his father left David in despair.

What ever pulled David into the pit of defeat—God could rescue him. That is what David confesses in *Psalm 40:1 I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry.*

- **The pit of sin.** This could be on David's mind as he remembered Bathsheba. Remember how David decided to stay home while he as King was supposed to be leading the army. While enjoying his palace in Jerusalem he looked down into the courtyard of a nearby house where the grand daughter of his aged counselor Ahithophel the Gilonite (II Samuel 15:12) lived were her husband the great warrior of King David, Uriah the Hittite. David had noticed her beauty at other occasions but this evening seeing her unclothed drew him to allow his lusts to plunge him into sin. The rest is so sadly known from 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 11.

Maybe you are caught in a similar sin. Maybe one sin has led you to another and you are hopelessly mired in the pit of sin. That is the nature of sin. Sin is a powerful monster that entraps all who play with it. While captivated by sin there is no end to what you may do. If you are in the pit of sin there is help available—God is in the business of rescuing us from sin.

Flee to Him, cry to Him from your pit and let Him pull you out and put your feet on the Rock. That is what David confesses in *Psalm 40:2 He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps.*

- **The pit of bad habits.** We must mortify our proud flesh. When David didn't, he may have thought of his pride that lured him into the sin of numbering the people. William James, in his classic *Principles of Psychology*, put it this way:

Could the young but realize how soon they will become mere walking bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct while in the plastic state. We are spinning our own fates, good or evil, and never to be undone. Every smallest stroke or virtue or vice leaves its ever so little scar.

The drunken Rip Van Winkle, in Jefferson's play, excuses himself for every fresh dereliction by saying, "I won't count this time! " Well! He may not count it, but it is being counted nonetheless. Down among his nerve cells and fibers the molecules are counting it, registering and storing it up to be used against him when the next temptation comes.

Nothing we ever do is, in strict scientific literalness, wiped out. Of course, this has its good side as well as its bad one.[2]

David knew that the Lord could change him and get him started on a fresh new path. That is what David confesses in *Psalm 40:3 He has put a new song in my mouth—Praise to our God; Many will see it and fear, And will trust in the Lord.*

Bad habits can be replaced by new ones. This happens by small Spirit prompted choices each day to obey and do God's will—that together form a new Spirit empowered habit.

- **The pit of circumstances.** If anyone could wallow in the despair of having all the worst of circumstances, David sure could. When he wasn't running from Saul, he was fleeing his own country men, or the Philistines and everything in between. But when ever we think of hard circumstances look at Paul's. Turn to 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11:24-28; 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 4:9-13; 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 6:4-10.

1 Corinthians 4:9-13 For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. 10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! 11 To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. 12 And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; 13 being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.

2 Corinthians 6:4-10 But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, 5 in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; 6 by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, 7 by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, 8 by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; 9 as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; 10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

2 Corinthians 11:24-28 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— 28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

David wouldn't let his circumstances defeat him and hold him down. That is what David confesses in Psalm 40:4 Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust, And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.

Christ is our refuge we can flee to Him at any time and in any condition—and He will never turn anyone away. So how did David get rescued from the pits? How did God lead him out? Here is the simple pathway recorded in this confession of God's faithfulness he made from the pits.

**1. DAVID REMEMBERED GOD'S WORK IN HIS LIFE.** David first notes the five ways God had worked in his life. Here is God's grace directed towards David—*Psalm 40:1-3 I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry. 2 He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps. 3 He has put a new song in my mouth— Praise to our God; Many will see it and fear, And will trust in the Lord.*

The first step out of the pits is to remember God's work in our lives. David remembered God's work in his life.

**2. DAVID REAFFIRMED HIS TRUST IN GOD.** Psalm 40:4-5 **Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust,** And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. 5 Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works Which You have done; And Your thoughts toward us Cannot be recounted to You in order; If I would declare and speak of them, They are more than can be numbered.

David verbally says that he trusts God. Sometimes we need to break the spiritual silence in our heart by talking to God. Telling Him what we know is true. Preaching the Gospel we believe—to ourselves! David reaffirmed his trust in God.

**3. DAVID RENEWED HIS SUBMISSION TO GOD.** Psalm 40:6-8 Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; **My ears You have opened.** Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. 7 Then I said, "Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me. 8 I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart."

Inviting God to open our ears is the key to submission with God. This is a dual analogy. Digging is a word for clearing away debris as well as deeply inscribing. These are the two steps to submission—clear out any hindrances that are in the way, and submit to the permanent marking of ownership.

First, the Hebrew word literally means "to dig out". Notice the other times it is used:

*Genesis 50:5 'My father made me swear, saying, "Behold, I am dying; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me." Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father, and I will come back.'* "

- **Like the grave**—you dug things out of my life so that there was room for you to fill my life. A grave was where they laid what was dearest to them on earth. God is through excruciating times making room in my life to deposit something special.

*Numbers 21:18 The well the leaders sank, **Dug** by the nation's nobles, By the lawgiver, with their staves." And from the wilderness they went to Mattanah,*

- **Like the well**--You took everything out of my life painful as it was, in these lonely times, so that I could hear your voice clearly and your water could flow into my life.

Both are pictures of clearing things out of the way--so that the water can flow into the well, and to make room for something in the grave. So David says you dug my ears.

Newton wrote, "T'was grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved...". What a beautiful way to look at hard times!

God is tunneling a well of water to refresh me; God is making room to bury into my life His greatest treasures. But that is not all that David shares with us from this time in the pits. There is another exciting picture for us of submission to God.

The second way that David uses this word is to look back at an ancient Mosaic ritual. When slaves had worked their term of service and it was time to be free they were released to start out on their own. But if the slaves loved their master and their work, they could request a lifetime servitude. This is covered in a fascinating ritual recorded in:

Exodus 21:1-6 "Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them: 2 If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. 3 If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. 4 If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. 5 But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' 6 then his master shall **bring him to the judges**. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall **pierce his ear** with an awl; and he shall **serve him forever**. (public, painful, and permanent)

For us on this side of the cross--here is such a moving picture of what God wants from us. He invites us to become His Bondslaves, servants for life. If we are willing and so desire we declare that publicly like Paul does so often. "I want to serve the Lord all my days". Then we make some painful choices in life to limit our flesh, discipline our life, invest in the world to come instead of merely in this world. And when we make that offering of our lives that is reflected in Romans 12, it is a permanent service that goes through life and lasts forever.

*Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you **present** (aorist infinitive—'remain in the state of) **your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.** 2 **And do not be conformed** (present imperative 'do not allow*

yourself to get squashed”) *to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

*Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

Thomas Chisholm says it best, “Oh Jesus, Lord and Savior—I give myself to Thee...”!

**4. DAVID REPEATED TRUTHS ABOUT GOD**—He is Righteous. Psalm 40:9-10 I have proclaimed the good news of **righteousness** In the great assembly; Indeed, I do not restrain my lips, O Lord, You Yourself know. 10 I have not hidden Your **righteousness** within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your loving kindness and Your truth From the great assembly.

As David looked back over his life of loneliness, desperation, sorrow and fear—he saw one truth most clearly, God is Righteous. The key New Testament book on righteousness is Romans—mentioned 66 times we see God’s righteousness and our need of it. In Romans Paul declares that God is righteous in the four key areas that matter for eternity:

- God is righteous in declaring us as hopeless in our **sin (1-2)**;
- God is righteous in providing for our **salvation (3-5, 9-11)**;
- God is righteous in demanding our **sanctification (6-8)**;
- God is righteous in bestowing gifts **for our service (12-16)**.

So David’s life testifies to God’s righteousness. God is always faithful and what He does is right! So David says God is righteous.

- God is righteous in my: Perilous years when I was a fugitive;
- God is righteous in my: Prosperous years when I was victorious in every battle and sat upon the Throne;
- God is righteous in my: Punitive years when I sinned and God had to chasten me;
- God is righteous in my: Peaceful years when I gathered treasures to build the Temple.

**5. DAVID REJOICES IN GOD.** Psalm 40: 11-17. The bottom line of life is—who do you want to please? There are only two possible choices at the deepest level. Either we please God or we in one way or another are seeking to please ourselves. David wanted God to be pleased. It started way back in his youth as we saw in Psalm 19.

*Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.*

David broke with the crowd, stopped getting and seeking approval from his peers and went straight to the top. He wanted God and God alone to be his goal. And that was still his desire.

One way or another we all get what we want in life. David wanted God. Do we? Really, down deep in your heart of hearts are you planning, figuring, calculating, scheming—how do give God more of your life? David was and did and look at him now—forever settled in Heaven as a man after God’s own heart.

**6. DAVID INTERCEDES FOR OTHERS.** Psalm 40: 16-17 *Though we at times are desperate—God is not.* He knows what is coming before it ever starts. God is managing every detail. What does David do in verse 4? He prays for others who sought God. What does that say to us? When we are alone and struggling it is the perfect time to pray for others who may be going through what we are facing. Here is a simple plan we can remember:

- Are you sick? Then pray for others who are sick—you know what they are going through!
- Are you abused by co-workers, family members, or classmates? Then pray for others going through the same pains and hurts.
- Are you in a dead end job? Then pray for hope for others that also face the daily struggle of what to do to survive in the days ahead.
- Are you successful and tempted to be selfish? Then pray for others you know who are also experiencing prosperity and ask God to keep them from selfishness and pride.

All of this was intended by God to prepare David for the throne—and how it did. What a great king he was. Like we saw this morning, from God’s creation we can learn a profound lesson. The mother eagle shows its love for its young by destroying their nest. Without this rude and painful start in their lives they would be too comfortable to ever learn to soar. Though they protest loudly the destruction continues until it is too painful to sit on all those sharp sticks—and they take flight. So God allows irritants

One final lesson--the message of Psalm 56, 34 and 70 is summarized in one of Paul’s most repeated exhortations, Philippians 4:6-7. If we could summarize these two verses they would say in the form of two imperatives: “**Worry about nothing; pray about everything!**”

David rejoiced in God. Are you? Troubles—yes; pessimism—no! Poor and needy—always!

That is how I came, that is how I come, and You remain the same Oh Lamb of God!

1. *Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.*
2. *Thy kingdom come.*
3. *Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*
4. *Give us this day our daily bread.*
5. *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*
6. *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:*

7. *For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen*

For a moment turn back with me to First Samuel 21-22 and get our bearings. But before we head into the group event of all those men who flock to David—we will catch him all alone.

David wrote more Psalms during this time--than at any other time in his life. These *cave Psalms are 4, 13, 40, 57, 70, 141-142*—lessons on how to overcome the feelings of loneliness and abandonment when we are far from help, or away from home and feel unable to go on.

I wonder have you ever felt prehistoric? And I know if you've watched television very much you've seen the conditions of what cave men look like. For them life reduced to grunts and groans. And life is an endless pursuit of nothingness at times. I like the way Edna St. Vincent Mallay put it a few years ago she said: "life must go on . . . I just can't remember why".

That's what I'm talking about--- a cave man sort of existence. A life when a vicious swirl of getting up, going to work out of the home or in the home if you're a mom--- dropping into bed exhausted at the end of the day only to find out that the entire month has gone by and falling further behind instead of ahead. That's the kind of life that I'm talking about and it's not foreign to most of us. We know what it's like; we know what it's like when it's hard.

### **Christ is Our Lifelong Refuge from Loneliness**

In I Samuel 22 where we will come to the fifth of the twelve severe times in David's life portrayed in the Psalms.

**David suffers intense loneliness as he feels abandoned while he begins to live and work with a tough crowd.** In First Samuel 22:1-2 as he moved into a cave at Adullam with an incredibly difficult group of men.

David could have been overcome with fear and grief and despair—but God held him up. In latter life David looked back on these times and wrote another Psalm, let's turn there next.

David had found a place he could always reach for safety and security—in any situation. The Lord was his refuge; the Lord is our refuge also. Christ our refuge is the safest spot in the Universe. He is the place we go when life gets tough.

**Psalm 70** is the final Psalm from this time in David's life. It is reflective as he looks back on this time and shares the Lord!

Psalm 70:1-5 Make haste, O God, to deliver me! Make haste to help me, O Lord! 2 Let them be ashamed and confounded Who seek my life; Let them be turned back and confused Who desire my hurt. 3 Let them be turned back because of their shame, Who say, "Aha, aha!" 4 ***Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; And let those who love Your salvation say continually, "Let God be magnified!"*** 5 But I am poor and needy; Make haste to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay.

Some practical steps to overcome loneliness are these:

- ***Cry to God when life is hollow.*** Life was so bad at this time that David says four times in verses 1, 5—make haste, come now, don't wait, hasten. He says Lord I am not going to make it in this job, this marriage, this family, this sickness, this disaster. Quickly come, I am sinking and am going to perish.
- ***Live with mysteries.*** We can't always know why God is allowing circumstances—but we do know we can trust Him to do all things well. Jesus said to His disciples in John 13:7, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.”
- ***Accept your situation.*** What is unchangeable must be accepted and lived through by God's grace. As Paul said, we must echo, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13)
- ***Don't be surprised by troubles.*** For a moment think who this is—David the man after God's heart. David the one Jesus is named after “Son of David” – and he had such a difficult life. Come to think of it, so did Moses, and Elijah, and Paul, and Peter—in fact, they all seem to have a hard life. If we look to the end of this Psalm we find in the conclusion the real goal God has for us. Real victory in life is not evading and escaping the majority of troubles that head our way. No, it is to seek that God be exalted through my life what ever He chooses to do with me and all my hard times.

**Psalm 57:4** My soul is among lions; I lie among the sons of men Who are set on fire, Whose teeth are spears and arrows, And their tongue a sharp sword.

What simple lessons can we find in cave times? ***Use lonely times to grow.*** One of the greatest truths we can discover is that lonely times usually accomplish great discoveries about God. David is at the depth of loneliness. He has been on the run for years and now he is hiding in a desolate cave in a crowd of malcontents, feeling very much alone. He has two choices. Stay in the cave of loneliness, descend into self-pity and sin or look up and use the time alone to grow.

Guess what David does? **Psalm 142:5-7** is the answer.

As we look there, why don't you take a moment and mark these for someone else who may need them someday. Or even for you if you ever feel the twinge of loneliness in your life. Look now and find:

- When alone I learn that You alone are my true REFUGE. Psalm 142:5a: ***loneliness means its time to flee to your Refuge.*** I will believe Your promise and turn to You as my Refuge right now.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true PORTION. Psalm 142:5b: ***loneliness means its time to feed on your Portion.*** I will believe Your promise to be all I need in this hard time.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true LISTENER. Psalm 142:6 'Give heed my cry': ***loneliness means its time to speak to your Master.*** I will believe Your promise and pour out all my troubles to You who care for me.

- When alone I learn that You alone are my true *DELIVERER* "bring" Psalm 142:7a: ***loneliness means its time to trust in your Redeemer.*** I will believe Your promise and let You rescue me now.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true *OBJECT OF WORSHIP* Psalm 142:7b: ***loneliness means its time to adore your Lord.*** I will believe Your promise and worship You even when I don't feel like it.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true *PROVIDER* "surround" Psalm 142:7c: ***loneliness means its time to rest in His Sufficient Provision.*** I will believe Your promise and let You surround me now with everything I need.

So again we ask ourselves—is Christ my refuge? Is that a personal chosen reality or just a fact I've heard? God will rock your boat just to see what you will do. Loneliness is a tool to glorify God, to turn and trust and triumph, and to make some great discoveries about God.

- Are you feeling the loneliness of youth? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of life facing family conflict and danger? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of job loss, and family separation? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of moving to a new location that is very foreign to you? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of living and working with a tough crowd? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of unemployment and unsettled home life? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of betrayal by friends? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of being wronged in a business deal? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of the complete loss of your family, friends, and finances? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of temptation and failure? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of chastisement and restoration? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of old age? *Jesus says I am always with you!*

## Put Into I Samuel Order

1. **David suffers the intense loneliness of unemployment and unsettled home life.** In First Samuel 22:5 and 23:14-16 as he was hiding from Saul in the Wilderness of Hareth, David takes time to write ***Psalms 17 and 63***—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are insecure. This was a time of no sure place to live, no reliable source of income and provision.

2. **David suffers the intense loneliness when betrayed by friends.** In First Samuel 23:10-13 as he escapes from Saul at Keilah and goes into hiding in the mountains of Ziph, David writes ***Psalms 31 and 54***. In First Samuel 24:1-16 after he spares the life of his mortal enemy King

Saul, David records his heart in *Psalm 7*. In First Samuel 23:29 as he hides in the cave at Engedi, David writes *Psalms 35-36*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are betrayed.

3. **David suffers the intense loneliness when wronged in business.** In First Samuel 25 in the Wilderness of Paran as he faces the danger of his anger toward Nabal “the fool” and as God delivers him, David writes *Psalm 53*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in danger of bitterness.

4. **David suffers the intense loneliness of the complete loss of his family, friends, and finances.** Finally in First Samuel 27 as he is grieved and endangered over the raid on his family and city of Ziklag, David writes *Psalms 16, 38 and 39*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in threat of loss.

5. **David suffers the intense loneliness of temptation and failure.** From the depths of conviction after his fall into sin with Bathsheba in II Samuel 11, David writes *Psalm 32*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are tempted and fail.

6. **David suffers the intense loneliness of chastisement and restoration.** From the pain of chastisement that leads to repentance and restoration in II Samuel 12, David sings of his faithful God in *Psalm 51*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in chastisement and restoration.

Finally We Find David’s Testimony Of God’s Closeness During His Old Age or His Waning Years

7. **David suffers the intense loneliness of old age.** And finally, at the end of his magnificent life, David extolls his Master and King in *Psalm 18*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in our last days before death. Especially note his life long praise to God in Psalm 18:46 The Lord lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let the God of my salvation be exalted.

Psalm 71 Christ our Refuge in the Loneliness of Weakness and Sickness before Death

Psalm 116 the Christ our Refuge in the Loneliness of Death

- ***We are not lonely at death if we always remember He hears us.*** Psalm 116:1 I love the Lord, because He has heard My voice and my supplications.
- ***We are not lonely at death if we pour out our fears and needs.*** Psalm 116:2 Because He has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live.
- ***We are not lonely at death if we always remember that troubles and sorrows are neither wrong nor avoidable.*** Psalm 116:3 The pains of death surrounded me, And the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. Every great saint since the Garden of Eden (except two) have died in pain of one form or another. Jesus died most painfully. It is not wrong or sinful to have troubles and sorrows—it is normal and also a part of God’s plan.

- ***We are not lonely at death if we seek the Lord's aid when life hurts.*** Psalm 116:4 Then I called upon the name of the Lord: "O Lord, I implore You, deliver my soul!"
- ***We are not lonely at death if we praise Him for His mercy and goodness that have followed us all through our life.*** Psalm 116:5-7 Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; Yes, our God is merciful. 6 The Lord preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me. 7 Return to your rest, O my soul, For the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.
- ***We are not lonely at death if we make it a habit to walk with God each day we live.*** Psalm 116:8-10 For You have delivered my soul from death, My eyes from tears, And my feet from falling. 9 I will walk before the Lord In the land of the living. 10 I believed, therefore I spoke, "I am greatly afflicted." The same One who walks through life with us keeps walking and takes us through the Valley of Death's shadows. And shadows of death are all we get—not death. Jesus said who ever lives and believes in Him will never die.
- ***We are not lonely at death if we drink from the cup of salvation.*** Psalm 116:12-13 What shall I render to the Lord For all His benefits toward me? 13 I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the Lord. Believers never die!
- ***We are not lonely at death if we seek to obey Him during life.*** Psalm 116:14 I will pay my vows to the Lord Now in the presence of all His people. Jesus said His sheep hear His voice, follow Him—and He gives them endless life, even when their body dies!
- ***We are not lonely at death if we serve Him in life.*** Psalm 116:15-16 Precious in the sight of the Lord Is the death of His saints. 16 O Lord, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds. Serving God is what saints are going to be doing forever!
- ***We are not lonely at death if we thank Him through life.*** Psalm 116:17-19 I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, And will call upon the name of the Lord. 18 I will pay my vows to the Lord Now in the presence of all His people, 19 In the courts of the Lord's house, In the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!

### Some practical steps to overcome loneliness are these:

1. ***Deal with sin.*** Be sure that there is no unconfessed or unforsaken sin left in your life to give the Devil a place in your life. (Eph. 4:27)
2. ***Share your burdens.*** Clearly tell the Lord all your fears, all your struggles, all your pains—remember that He knows our frame that we are dust. (Psalm 103)
3. ***Abandon all self-pity.*** Constant self-sorrow is a one way ticket to loneliness. Self-pity denies we have a responsibility to deal with our emotions and thus frustrates any cure. As Jesus said, coming after Him means we deny our self (Luke 9:23).

**Mel Trotter** (1870 – 1940)

*"I was there when it happened, January 19, 1897, 10 minutes past 9, Central time, Pacific Garden Mission, Chicago, Illinois, USA."-Mel Trotter's response when asked how he knew he was saved."*

Mel Trotter's father was a drunkard who owned a saloon. His son followed in his footsteps,

becoming an alcoholic before he was twenty. His mother was a godly woman, but Mel followed his father's example.

Trotter married, and he and his wife had a baby, but his appetite for drink continued. He would go weeks at a time without a drink, but then he would go on drunken binges again. Once he "drank up" the family horse and buggy, leaving them without any means of transportation. He returned home from a ten-day drinking spree to find his only child dead in his wife's arms. Bitter and broken, he left home and went to Chicago.

During the brutal winter he was reduced to selling his own shoes to finance his drinking. Finally even the saloons kicked him out. On his way to Lake Michigan, intending to drown himself, he passed by the Pacific Garden Rescue Mission. He was pulled inside and sat slumped through the testimony of Harry Monroe, a converted alcoholic, then superintendent of the mission. At the invitation, Trotter went forward and accepted Christ as his Savior.

Mel and his wife moved to Chicago, and he spent nearly every night working at the mission. With Monroe he traveled to area churches seeking support.

In 1900 a new rescue mission was established in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Trotter was asked to come and lead the new work. The Lord prospered the work there, and it grew and expanded until facilities were purchased which could handle 750 men.

One of Trotter's greatest victories was when the saloon next door to the mission was forced to close for lack of business. Trotter carried a burden for rescue missions in other cities as well. He helped found more than 65 other rescue missions during his life. It was not unusual for Trotter to be asked to fill in for R. A. Torrey or Billy Sunday in one of their great revival campaigns. The power of his personal testimony gave great weight to his preaching.

Mel was not spared from the affects of alcohol on his body from those years of life in the pits of sin. Ill health marked the last few years of his life. He suffered from cancer which required repeated surgeries.

He last preached at his mission in Grand Rapids in January 1940 for the 40th anniversary celebration of that great work. His favorite verse was II Corinthians 5:17. God truly made him a new creature.[3]

## **One Life God Rescued From The Pit of Sin.**

### **John Newton**

Who[4] am I? My godly mother died when I was a young child. Reared by a sea-captain father, taken to sea at age eleven, I soon forgot the Scriptures she had taught me.

Several years later, I was pressed into the British navy and became a midshipman. By then I had earned the reputation of being able to curse for two hours straight without repeating a word.

Restless and wild, I tried to desert, was caught, stripped, whipped severely, and degraded to the ranks. I eventually ran away to Africa, but only so 'I might sin my fill.' And I did.

Debauched and distant from God, I fell into the hands of a Portuguese slave trader. For months the chief woman of the trader's harem treated me like an animal, beating me and forcing me to grovel in the dirt for my food.

Reduced to a mangy cur of a man, I finally escaped and made my way to the shores of Africa. Picked up by a passing ship I earned the position of first mate because I was a skilled navigator. But while the captain was ashore one day, I broke out the ship's rum and got the entire crew drunk. When the captain came back, he was so furious he hit me, knocking me overboard.

I would have drowned were it not for a sailor who pulled me back on board by spearing my thigh with a boat hood. The wound was so large that it left a scar big enough to put my fist in. Some weeks later, when the ship neared the coast of Scotland, it sailed into a storm and almost sank. For days I manned the pumps below deck in what seemed a hopeless nightmare.

It was then that I desperately called out to God. He answered my helpless cry, and I emerged from the hold of that ship to later become the chaplain of England's Parliament and even to preach before the king. I am the vile blasphemer whom many would subsequently refer to as the second founder of the Church of England. And it was I who wrote:

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found,

Was blind, but now I see.

These were the lyrics born out of my wayward, free-versed life. And to my ears, there is no sweeter sound than grace in all the world. Who am I? John Newton.

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[1] James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms—An Expositional Commentary—Volume 1—Psalms 1-41*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998, p. 346-47.

[2] William James, *Principles of Psychology* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 1952), p. 83.

[3] <http://www.swordofthelord.com/biographies/trotter.htm>

[4] Swindoll, *Shedding Light*, p. 100-101.

## **Finding Christ in the Pits**

### **COR: Message Fifteen (050828AM)**

As we open to Psalm 40 this morning, David feels all alone, abandoned and dejected. Why?

In verses 1-4 we find that he was out of touch with the Lord. His life was defeated. He had yielded to sin. He had cultivated bad habits. He had allowed his circumstances to get him completely down.

Sounds familiar doesn't it?

That is exactly the pathway so many had followed. The good news is that Psalm 40 gives us the map to escape these pits of life. By fleeing to the Lord we find a refuge where we are delivered from constant defeats, besetting sins, crippling habits and paralyzing circumstances. And as we have found each step of the way through this series, the way out is always by fleeing to Christ as our Refuge!

This morning, if you feel far from God—check these four areas of your life: what areas defeat you, what sins capture you, what habits control you, and what circumstances drive you?

Chances are that one or more of these areas has buried you in a pit, and you are so deep that you no longer can hear the voice of God speaking to your heart through His Spirit, and from His Word.

David's testimony is an invitation for us to find Christ when we are in the pits of life!

David was in a pit under layers of defeats, sin, habits, and circumstances. David was learning how precious it was to hear the Lord's voice. He speaks in Psalm 40 about how God had to "dig ears for him".

"My ears You have opened" in Psalm 40:6b in Hebrew is literally "two ears You have dug for me." David is picturing his desire to reflect Christ's coming obedience and dedication. This is a messianic Psalm, a look ahead through David's life at the coming Christ.

We saw last week in v. 1-2, that God had to dig through the depths of his defeats and sins. God came to David and had to dig away all the debris that was blocking David's ability to hear and respond to God's voice in His Word.

The steep rise in the price of gasoline at the pump has made us all realize the new stage our world has entered—more fuels are needed than are readily available close to the surface.

Many geologists note that there is actually still a vast amount of fossil fuels, it is just getting to them that is harder and harder. All that seems to lie in the way is up to three miles of dirt and rock! Digging through all that, especially because drilling two miles deep can go as slow as 4 feet per hour, and when you are trying to travel down another mile--that can take a long time, and be very costly.

Usually we pay according to how precious, or rare, or hard it is to find an object. The fewer or more difficult places it can be found, the more it costs. That is true with precious stones like diamonds, precious metals like gold, and now precious fossil fuels like petroleum.

This morning in Psalm 40 David confesses for all the world to hear—that he has become buried in the pits of life. And this Psalm is his fleeing to the Lord for refuge. And as we will see this morning, that refuge involves God clearing out, tunneling through, drilling deep, and removing whatever stands in the way of David hearing God’s voice—and responding in submissive obedience.

David was told by the Spirit of God that this would be Christ's desire—and that is the desire that David embraced, even in the deepest pits of discouragement, depression, despair, and loneliness.

- No matter what **sin tripped him up**—David said I want to do your will. I will obey. I will dedicate myself to do your will.
- No matter what **emotion pushed him down**—David said I want to do your will. I will obey. I will dedicate myself to do your will.
- No matter what **dark thought pierced him through**—David said I want to do your will. I will obey. I will dedicate myself to do your will.
- No matter what **temptation to quit surrounded him**—David said I want to do your will. I will obey. I will dedicate myself to do your will.

Is that where you are this morning? Even if you are in the pits—nothing can keep you there if you desire to do God’s will with all your heart.

Let's join him in Psalm 40 as we read just the opening verses of this struggling young person, living for God—in the pits!

Psalm 40:1-8. Pray The path out of the pits—that would be a great title for this Psalm!

If you have ever been in the pits, or know someone who has—listen and learn. This is a Divine gift to us in God's Word!

## Drilling Through Pits

What are the pits David was talking about? There are four possibilities drawn from various eras of David’s life. Remember, David wrote this after the events. He is looking back with an inspired view of life. God’s Spirit within him opened his mind and guided his words.

Everything in this Psalm is exactly what the Spirit of God wanted him to say about these times in the pits. Here are the various pits in David’s life that God had to dig out, drill through and remove lots of debris--for David to stay in touch with God.

- **The pit of defeat.** This could be Saul in David’s mind. It was so hard. Saul could never be pleased no matter how hard David tried; or maybe it was Saul’s bitter hatred and jealousy at David’s success that defeated David; or even the bitter agony and defeat of David’s own son Absalom’s betrayal and attempt to destroy his father left David in despair.

What ever pulled David into the pit of defeat—God could rescue him. That is what David confesses in *Psalms 40:1 I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry*. After the Lord dug through those layers of defeat, David could again hear His voice and feel His presence.

- **The pit of sin.** This could be on David's mind as he remembered Bathsheba. Remember how David decided to stay home while he as King was supposed to be leading the army. While enjoying his palace in Jerusalem he looked down into the courtyard of a nearby house where the grand- daughter of his aged counselor Ahithophel the Gilonite (II Samuel 15:12) lived with her husband the great warrior of King David, Uriah the Hittite. David had noticed her beauty at other occasions but this evening seeing her unclothed drew him to allow his lusts to plunge him into sin. The rest is so sadly known from 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 11.

Maybe you are caught in a similar sin. Maybe one sin has led you to another and you are hopelessly mired in the pit of sin. That is the nature of sin. Sin is a powerful monster that entraps all who play with it. While captivated by sin there is no end to what you may do. If you are in the pit of sin there is help available—God is in the business of rescuing us from sin.

Flee to Him, cry to Him from your pit and let Him pull you out and put your feet on the Rock. But that will only happen when you repent by seeing that sin is horrible like David says, and that it mires us down like David describes. And that is exactly what David confesses in *Psalms 40:2 He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps*. After the Lord dug through those layers of sin, David could again hear His voice and feel His presence.

- **The pit of bad habits.** We must mortify our proud flesh, when David didn't he may have thought of his pride that lured him into the sin of numbering the people (2 Samuel 24). Habits control our lives either for the good or for the bad. Be careful what habits you cultivate in your life—those small things we do over and over again. Make wise choices. William James, in his classic *Principles of Psychology*, put it this way:

Could the young but realize how soon they will become mere walking bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct while in the plastic state. We are spinning our own fates, good or evil, and never to be undone. Every smallest stroke or virtue or vice leaves its ever so little scar.

The drunken Rip Van Winkle, in Jefferson's play, excuses himself for every fresh dereliction by saying, "It won't count this time! " Well! He may not count it, but it is being counted nonetheless. Down among his nerve cells and fibers the molecules are counting it, registering and storing it up to be used against him when the next temptation comes.

Nothing we ever do is, in strict scientific literalness, wiped out. Of course, this has its good side as well as its bad one.[1]

David knew that the Lord could change him and get him started on a fresh new path. That is what David confesses in *Psalm 40:3 He has put a new song in my mouth—Praise to our God; Many will see it and fear, And will trust in the Lord.*

After the Lord dug through those layers of habits, David could again hear His voice and feel His presence.

Bad habits can be replaced by new ones that are good. This happens by small Spirit prompted choices each day to obey and do God's will—those choices can form a new Spirit empowered habit.

- **The pit of circumstances.** If anyone could wallow in the despair of having all the worst of circumstances, David sure could. When he wasn't running from Saul, he was fleeing his own countrymen, or the Philistines and everything in between.

David knew that God was watching over every step of his life, he knew God had orchestrated every circumstance to maximize his ability to glorify the Lord! So he joyfully exclaims in *Psalm 40:4 Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust, And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.*

After the Lord dug through those layers of circumstances, David could again hear His voice and feel His presence.

But whenever we think of hard circumstances look at Paul's. Turn to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 4:9-13; 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 6:4-10; 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11:24-28.

- *1 Corinthians 4:11-13 To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. 12 And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; 13 being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.*
- *2 Corinthians 6:4-10 But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, 5 in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; 6 by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, 7 by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, 8 by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; 9 as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; 10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*
- *2 Corinthians 11:24-28 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold*

*and nakedness— 28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.*

Did Paul stay in the pit of circumstances? No, God drilled down through all those troubles and said something to Paul. Remember what He said?

- *2 Corinthians 12:9-10 And He said to me, “**My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.**” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. **For when I am weak, then I am strong.***

We didn’t choose and can’t change most of our circumstances—but we can choose our attitude. Paul chose to embrace Christ's gracious offer! Just like David who wouldn’t let his circumstances defeat him and hold him down. That is what David confesses in *Psalm 40:4 **Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust, And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.***

## The Pathway Out of the Pits

Christ is our refuge; we can flee to Him at any time and in any condition—and He will never turn anyone away. So how did David get rescued from the pits? How did God lead him out? Here is the simple pathway recorded in this confession of God’s faithfulness he made from the pits. First note his six steps on the pathway the Lord led him by out of the pits. If you haven’t penciled these into your copy of the 40<sup>th</sup> Psalm you can do that now. After this survey, we will look at each one closely.

1. **DAVID REMEMBERED GOD’S WORK IN HIS LIFE.** David first notes the five ways God had worked in his life. Here is God’s grace directed towards David—*Psalm 40:1-3 I waited patiently for the Lord; And **He inclined** to me, And **heard** my cry. 2 He also **brought me up** out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And **set my feet** upon a rock, And **established** my steps. 3 He has put a new song in my mouth— Praise to our God; Many will see it and fear, And will trust in the Lord.*

2. **DAVID REAFFIRMED HIS TRUST IN GOD.** Psalm 40:4-5 **Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust,** And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. 5 Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works Which You have done; And Your thoughts toward us Cannot be recounted to You in order; If I would declare and speak of them, They are more than can be numbered.

David *verbally* says that he trusts God.

3. **DAVID RENEWED HIS SUBMISSION TO GOD.** Psalm 40:6-8 Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; **My ears You have opened.** Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. 7 Then I said, “Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me. 8 I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart.”

4. **DAVID REPEATED TRUTHS ABOUT GOD**—He is Righteous. Psalm 40:9-10 I have proclaimed the good news of **righteousness** In the great assembly; Indeed, I do not restrain my lips, O Lord, You Yourself know. 10 I have not hidden Your **righteousness** within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your loving kindness and Your truth From the great assembly.

5. **DAVID REJOICES IN GOD.** Psalm 40:11-17 Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O Lord; Let Your loving kindness and Your truth continually preserve me. 12 For innumerable evils have surrounded me; My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up; They are more than the hairs of my head; Therefore my heart fails me. 13 Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me; O Lord, make haste to help me! 14 Let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion Who seek to destroy my life; Let them be driven backward and brought to dishonor Who wish me evil. 15 Let them be confounded because of their shame, Who say to me, “Aha, aha!” 16 Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; Let such as love Your salvation say continually, “The Lord be magnified!” 17 But I am poor and needy; Yet the Lord thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer; Do not delay, O my God.

The bottom line of life is—who do you want to please? There are only two possible choices at the deepest level. Either we please God or we in one way or another are seeking to please ourselves. David wanted God to be pleased. It started way back in his youth as we saw in Psalm 19.

6. **DAVID INTERCEDES FOR OTHERS.** Psalm 40: 16-17 **Let all those who seek You** rejoice and be glad in You; Let such as love Your salvation say continually, “The Lord be magnified!” 17 But I am poor and needy; Yet the Lord thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer; Do not delay, O my God. ***Though we at times are desperate—God is not.*** He knows what is coming before it ever starts. God is managing every detail. What does David do in verse 4 and again in 16? He prays for others who sought God. What does that say to us? When we are alone and struggling, it is the perfect time to pray for others who may be going through what we are facing. Here is a simple plan we can remember:

Now, lets go back over this Psalm and learn from each step David took as the Lord led him out of the pits.

1. **DAVID REMEMBERED GOD’S WORK IN HIS LIFE.** David first notes the five ways God had worked in his life. Here is God’s grace directed towards David—*Psalm 40:1-3 I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry. 2 He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps. 3 He has put a new song in my mouth— Praise to our God; Many will see it and fear, And will trust in the Lord.*

The first step out of the pits is to remember God’s work in our lives. David remembered God’s work in his life. Think back over your salvation experience. Repeat it to yourself, mull it over in your heart. Then think of the last time you cried to the Lord and He responded. Go over that in your mind—that is what David was doing!

Maybe even use another's words to capture your own experience—for example John Newton's (1725-1807) "Amazing Grace" (Hymn # 202).

1. Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.

2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace my fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed.

3. The Lord has promised good to me,  
His Word my hope secures;  
He will my Shield and Portion be,  
As long as life endures.

4. Through many dangers, toils and snares,  
I have already come;  
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.

\*. Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,  
And mortal life shall cease,  
I shall possess, within the veil,  
A life of joy and peace.

\*. The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,  
The sun forbear to shine;  
But God, Who called me here below,  
Shall be forever mine.

5. When we've been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we'd first begun.

Another great remembrance of God's work in our lives saving us is Charles Wesley's (1707-1788) "And Can it Be?" (Hymn # 203). I especially like the third and fourth stanzas:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,

I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;  
Alive in Him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness divine,  
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.  
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

**Like David, we need to remember God's work of grace in our lives.**

**2. DAVID REAFFIRMED HIS TRUST IN GOD.** Psalm 40:4-5 **Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust,** And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. 5 Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works Which You have done; And Your thoughts toward us Cannot be recounted to You in order; If I would declare and speak of them, They are more than can be numbered.

David *verbally* says that he trusts God.

Sometimes we need to break the spiritual silence in our heart by *talking to God*. *Telling Him* what we know is true. *Preaching the Gospel* we believe—to ourselves! David reaffirmed his trust in God. Are you?

Do you remember the words to last Sunday's hymn? It is a great sermon to preach to your soul. Why not practice with me? Lets repeat these words to the Lord and remember God's work in our lives.

Before the throne of God above  
I have a strong and perfect plea.  
A great high Priest whose Name is Love  
Who ever lives and pleads for me.  
My name is graven on His hands,  
My name is written on His heart.  
I know that while in Heaven He stands  
No tongue can bid me thence depart.

When Satan tempts me to despair  
And tells me of the guilt within,  
Upward I look and see Him there  
Who made an end of all my sin.  
Because the sinless Savior died  
My sinful soul is counted free.

For God the just is satisfied  
To look on Him and pardon me.

Behold Him there the risen Lamb,  
My perfect spotless righteousness,  
The great unchangeable I AM,  
King of glory and of grace,  
One in Himself I cannot die.  
My soul is purchased by His blood,  
My life is hid with Christ on high,  
With Christ my Savior and my God!

**Like David, we need to reaffirm our trust in the Lord.**

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[1] William James, Principles of Psychology (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 1952), p. 83.

## **Escaping The Pits**

### **COR: Message Sixteen (050828PM)**

How does God rescue us from all the pits we fall into through life? That's what Psalm 40 is all about!

**The Pathway out of the Pits**

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Now, lets go back over this Psalm and learn from each step David took as the Lord led him out of the pits.

**1. DAVID REMEMBERED GOD'S WORK IN HIS LIFE.** David first notes the five ways God had worked in his life. Here is God's grace directed towards David—*Psalm 40:1-3 I waited patiently for the Lord; And **He inclined** to me, And **heard** my cry. 2 He also **brought me up** out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And **set my feet** upon a rock, And **established** my steps. 3 He has put a new song in my mouth— Praise to our God; Many will see it and fear, And will trust in the Lord.*

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Sometimes we need to break the spiritual silence in our heart by *talking to God. Telling Him* what we know is true. *Preaching the Gospel* we believe—to ourselves! David reaffirmed his trust in God. Are you?

Do you remember the words to last Sunday's hymn? It is a great sermon to preach to your soul. Why not practice with me? Lets repeat these words to the Lord and remember God's work in our lives?

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When Satan tempts me to despair  
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Upward I look and see Him there  
Who made an end of all my sin.  
Because the sinless Savior died  
My sinful soul is counted free.  
For God the just is satisfied  
To look on Him and pardon me.

Behold Him there the risen Lamb,  
My perfect spotless righteousness,  
The great unchangeable I AM,  
King of glory and of grace,  
One in Himself I cannot die.  
My soul is purchased by His blood,  
My life is hid with Christ on high,  
With Christ my Savior and my God!

**Like David, we need to reaffirm our trust in the Lord..**

**3. DAVID RENEWED HIS SUBMISSION TO GOD.** Psalm 40:6-8 Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; **My ears You have opened.** Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. 7 Then I said, "Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me. 8 I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart."

Inviting God to open our ears is the key to submission with God. This is a dual analogy. Digging is a word for clearing away debris as well as deeply inscribing. These are the two steps to submission—clear out any hindrances that are in the way, and submit to the permanent marking of ownership.

First, the Hebrew word literally means "to dig out". Notice the other times it is used:

- *Genesis 50:5 'My father made me swear, saying, "Behold, I am dying; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me." Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father, and I will come back.'* "

**Like the grave**—you dug things out of my life so that there was room for you to fill my life. A grave was where they laid what was dearest to them on earth. God is through excruciating times making room in my life to deposit something special.

- *Numbers 21:18 **The well** the leaders sank, **Dug** by the nation's nobles, By the lawgiver, with their staves." And from the wilderness they went to Mattanah,*

**Like the well**--You took everything out of my life painful as it was, in these lonely times, so that I could hear your voice clearly and your water could flow into my life.

Both are pictures of clearing things out of the way--so that the water can flow into the well, and to make room for something in the grave. So David says you dug my ears.

What a beautiful way to look at hard times!

God is tunneling a well of water to refresh me; God is making room to bury into my life His greatest treasures. But that is not all that David shares with us from this time in the pits. There is another exciting picture for us of submission to God.

The second way that David uses this word is to look back at an ancient Mosaic ritual. When slaves had worked their term of service and it was time to be free they were released to start out on their own. But if the slaves loved their master and their work, they could request a lifetime servitude. This is covered in a fascinating ritual recorded in:

- Exodus 21:1-6 “Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them: 2 If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. 3 If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. 4 If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master’s, and he shall go out by himself. 5 But if the servant plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ 6 then his master shall **bring him to the judges**. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall **pierce his ear** with an awl; and he shall **serve him forever**. (public, painful, and permanent)

For us on this side of the cross--here is such a moving picture of what God wants from us. He invites us to become His Bondslaves, servants for life. If we are willing and so desire we declare that publicly like Paul does so often. “I want to serve the Lord all my days.” Then we make some painful choices in life to limit our flesh, discipline our life, invest in the world to come instead of merely in this world. And when we make that offering of our lives that is reflected in Romans 12, it is a permanent service that goes through life and lasts forever.

- *Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you **present** (aorist infinitive—‘remain in the state of) **your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.** 2 **And do not be conformed** (present imperative ‘do not allow yourself to get squashed”) *to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**
- *Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; **it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me;** and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

Thomas Chisholm (1866-1960) says it best (Hymn # 372), “Oh Jesus, Lord and Savior—I give myself to Thee...”!

Living for Jesus, a life that is true,  
Striving to please Him in all that I do;

Yielding allegiance, glad hearted and free,  
This is the pathway of blessing for me.

Refrain

O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee,  
For Thou, in Thy atonement, didst give Thyself for me.  
I own no other Master, my heart shall be Thy throne.  
My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ, for Thee alone.

Living for Jesus Who died in my place,  
Bearing on Calvary my sin and disgrace;  
Such love constrains me to answer His call,  
Follow His leading and give Him my all.

Refrain

Living for Jesus, wherever I am,  
Doing each duty in His holy Name;  
Willing to suffer affliction and loss,  
Deeming each trial a part of my cross.

Refrain

Living for Jesus through earth's little while,  
My dearest treasure, the light of His smile;  
Seeking the lost ones He died to redeem,  
Bringing the weary to find rest in Him.

Refrain

**Like David, we need to renew our submission to the Lord.**

4. **DAVID REPEATED TRUTHS ABOUT GOD**—He is Righteous. Psalm 40:9-10 I have proclaimed the good news of **righteousness** In the great assembly; Indeed, I do not restrain my lips, O Lord, You Yourself know. 10 I have not hidden Your **righteousness** within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your loving kindness and Your truth From the great assembly.

As David looked back over his life of loneliness, desperation, sorrow and fear—he saw one truth most clearly, God is Righteous. The key New Testament book on righteousness is Romans—mentioned 66 times we see God's righteousness and our need of it. In Romans Paul declares that God is righteous in the four key areas that matter for eternity:

- God is righteous in declaring us as hopeless in our **sin (1-2)**;
- God is righteous in providing for our **salvation (3-5, 9-11)**;

- God is righteous in demanding our **sanctification (6-8)**;
- God is righteous in bestowing gifts **for our service (12-16)**.

So David's life testifies to God's righteousness. God is always faithful and what He does is right! So David says God is righteous.

- God is righteous in my: Perilous years when I was a fugitive;
- God is righteous in my: Prosperous years when I was victorious in every battle and sat upon the Throne;
- God is righteous in my: Punitive years when I sinned and God had to chasten me;
- God is righteous in my: Peaceful years when I gathered treasures to build the Temple.

### **Like David, we need to repeat truths about the Lord.**

5. **DAVID REJOICES IN GOD.** Psalm 40: 11-17. The bottom line of life is—who do you want to please? There are only two possible choices at the deepest level. Either we please God or we in one way or another are seeking to please ourselves. David wanted God to be pleased. It started way back in his youth as we saw in Psalm 19.

- *Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.*

David broke with the crowd, stopped getting and seeking approval from his peers and went straight to the top. He wanted God and God alone to be his goal. And that was still his desire.

One way or another we all get what we want in life. David wanted God. Do we? Really, down deep in your heart of hearts are you planning, figuring, calculating, scheming—how do give God more of your life? David was and did and look at him now—forever settled in Heaven as a man after God's own heart.

### **Like David, we need to rejoice in the Lord.**

6. **DAVID INTERCEDES FOR OTHERS.** Psalm 40: 16-17 *Though we at times are desperate—God is not.* He knows what is coming before it ever starts. God is managing every detail. What does David do in verse 4? He prays for others who sought God. What does that say to us? When we are alone and struggling it is the perfect time to pray for others who may be going through what we are facing. Here is a simple plan we can remember:

- Are you sick? Then pray for others who are sick—you know what they are going through!
- Are you abused by co-workers, family members, or classmates? Then pray for others going through the same pains and hurts.
- Are you in a dead end job? Then pray for hope for others that also face the daily struggle of what to do to survive in the days ahead.
- Are you successful and tempted to be selfish? Then pray for others you know who are also experiencing prosperity and ask God to keep them from selfishness and pride.

## **Like David, we need to intercede for others.**

All of this was intended by God to prepare David for the throne—and how it did. What a great king he was. Like we saw this morning, from God’s creation we can learn a profound lesson. The mother eagle shows its love for its young by destroying their nest. Without this rude and painful start in their lives they would be too comfortable to ever learn to soar. Though they protest loudly the destruction continues until it is too painful to sit on all those sharp sticks—and they take flight. So God allows irritants

David could have been overcome with fear and grief and despair—but God held him up. In latter life David looked back on these times and wrote another Psalm, let’s turn there next.

David had found a place he could always reach for safety and security—in any situation. The Lord was his refuge; the Lord is our refuge also. Christ our refuge is the safest spot in the Universe. He is the place we go when life gets tough.

**Psalm 70** is the final Psalm from this time in David’s life. It is reflective as he looks back on this time and shares the Lord!

- Psalm 70:1-5 Make haste, O God, to deliver me! Make haste to help me, O Lord! 2 Let them be ashamed and confounded Who seek my life; Let them be turned back and confused Who desire my hurt. 3 Let them be turned back because of their shame, Who say, “Aha, aha!” 4 ***Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; And let those who love Your salvation say continually, “Let God be magnified!”*** 5 But I am poor and needy; Make haste to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay.

***Cry to God when life is hollow.*** Life was so bad at this time that David says four times in verses 1, 5—make haste, come now, don’t wait, hasten. He says Lord I am not going to make it in this job, this marriage, this family, this sickness, this disaster. Quickly come, I am sinking and am going to perish.

***Don’t be surprised by troubles.*** For a moment think who this is—David the man after God’s heart. David the one Jesus is named after “Son of David” - and he had such a difficult life. Come to think of it, so did Moses, and Elijah, and Paul, and Peter—in fact, they all seem to have a hard life. If we look to the end of this Psalm we find in the conclusion the real goal God has for us. Real victory in life is not evading and escaping the majority of troubles that head our way. No, it is to seek that God be exalted through my life what ever He chooses to do with me and all my hard times.

***Live with mysteries.*** We can’t always know why God is allowing circumstances—but we do know we can trust Him to do all things well. Jesus said to His disciples in John 13:7, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.”

***Accept your situation.*** What is unchangeable must be accepted and lived through by God's grace. As Paul said, we must echo, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13)

One final lesson--the message of Psalm 56, 34 and 70 is summarized in one of Paul's most repeated exhortations, Philippians 4:6-7. If we could summarize these two verses they would say in the form of two imperatives: "***Worry about nothing; pray about everything!***"

David rejoiced in God. Are you? Troubles—yes; pessimism—no! Poor and needy—always!

## Rejoicing in the Pits

### COR: Message Seventeen (050904AM)

Since Hurricane Katrina hit last Sunday—

- Millions of lives have been disrupted.
- Tens of thousands have lost everything.
- Tens of thousands are homeless.
- Thousands are out of touch with friends and family.

- Multiplied thousands are jobless.
- Many thousands are refugees.
- And all of them are unsure about the future.

Events like those of this past week are unforgettably imprinted upon our memories.

The fear, pain, hopelessness we saw reflected from the crowds waiting to be rescued from the devastation in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans—is a collective picture of what some individuals face every day.

We are seeing hundreds of thousands of people facing all at once, together, what David faced alone for months.

Remember where we are in God's Word—we are searching the Scriptures and finding the testimony of David that God was his refuge. We know as New Testament believers that we also are to flee to Christ as our Refuge.

Where is David when he wrote the 40<sup>th</sup> Psalm? He was remembering life at the bottom, life in the pits.

- David had lost everything.
- David was homeless.
- David was out of touch with his family and friends and did not know who survived and who hadn't.
- David had no sure supply of food or water.
- David had to find an escape route to flee the dangers he faced.
- David's life and emotions were flooded by a hurricane of troubles.

But David had a choice—sink into despair or flee to the Lord as his refuge. That is the same choice each of us this morning have each day of our lives.

He chose to flee to God and wrote down in this Psalm 40 the pathway out when you find yourself hitting bottom in life.

Believers in Christ aren't prevented from hard times and bottoming out in life—they just always have a way out. In fact, most of God's greatest servants have spent a great deal of time in what we could call the pits of life.

What can God do with our hard times, lonely times, dark times and fearful times? He can use them if we give ourselves to Him. In fact, we can even begin to rejoice in the Goodness of God even in the darkest of circumstances. That is what David does in Psalm 40 and that is what Paul tells us by the power of the Holy Spirit—we all can do in every circumstance we find ourselves in through all of life.

- ***1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.***

Let me illustrate that truth this morning from the life of a very well known person from history.

What is the most widely read, best selling book in the whole world next to the Bible? It is the work of a man who sat in a lonely prison cell for one third of his adult life. A man who lost his first wife to death, had handicapped children, faced constant hardship and loss for much of his adult life. His name—John Bunyan. His book—*Pilgrim's Progress*.

John Bunyan did just as David does in the Psalm we have been feeding upon these past few weeks. That attitude of fleeing to the Lord for refuge and going on in spite of trials and hardship produced an enduring legacy of praise to the Lord from both David's and John Bunyan's lives. And their testimonies about those hard times have become songs, hymns, and well know books.

Turn again with me to Psalm 40. As you go there, let me tell you about Bunyan's loneliness of the pits and what God produced in his life amidst the stench and filth of a 17<sup>th</sup> century English prison.

Although Bunyan authored 60 books, the most famous is *Pilgrim's Progress*. Begun as a story to entertain his children on their visits to his jail cell, it has become one of the most famous and enduring works of Christian fiction.

Bunyan wrote most of the book during his second stay in jail on the brown paper covers his wife used as stoppers on the milk jugs she brought to him in prison. He seems to have been imprisoned at this time for six months, probably in the tiny one-room jail on the bridge over the River Ouse. First published in 1678, *Pilgrim's Progress* sold more than 100,000 copies in its first year in print and remains a best-seller to this day[1].

Bunyan describes his salvation and the hard pathway of life in this world as a believer. Perhaps better than anyone, John Bunyan expressed the quest for God that marks the Christian life. *Pilgrim's Progress* is the allegorical story of a man who, in a dream, meets a man named Evangelist who asks the despondent hero why he is crying. His answer is poignant:

Sir, I perceive by the Book in my hand, that I am condemned to die, and after that to come to Judgment; and I find that I am not willing to do the first, nor able to do the second.

The hero suffers from two problems. He is unwilling to die. He is also unable to stand before God. This is not the inability to appear at judgment—that is inevitable—but to *survive* the judgment of God. He verbalizes his fear by saying:

I fear that this Burden that is upon my back, will sink me lower than the grave.

The place "lower than the grave" is the abyss of hell. Like a fishing line with a small piece of lead attached at the end to make it sink to the depth of the lake, so the person weighted down by a massive burden of sin will sink into the depths of hell.

Christian, the hero of Bunyan's story, flees from the wrath to come, and sets his face toward the shining Light and the Wicket Gate to seek an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and which fades not away[2]. That is his salvation experience.

His course toward glory is marked by obstacles, however. Friends named Obstinate and Pliable mock him and try to dissuade him from his mission. He encounters the slough of Despond early in his pilgrimage and falls into it. A man named Help rescues him from his plight and says:

This miry slough is such a place as cannot be mended: It is the descent whither the scum and filth that attends Conviction for Sin doth continually run, and therefore it is called the slough of Despond; for still as the Sinner is awakened about his lost condition, there ariseth in his soul many fears and doubts, and discouraging apprehensions, which all of them get together, and settle in this place: And this is the reason of the badness of this place.

What Christian has never visited the slough of Despond? Who has never tried to avoid it altogether? Our souls have all been assailed by doubts, fears, and discouragements. It is not by accident that the most frequent admonition from the lips of Jesus in the New Testament is the exhortation to "Fear not." [3]

When we choose to obey. We flee to the Lord. And like David we find a place he could always reach for safety and security—in any situation. The Lord was his refuge; the Lord is our refuge also. Christ our refuge is the safest spot in the Universe. He is the place we go when life gets tough. He is our pathway out of the pits, so that we can rejoice anytime, anywhere we find ourselves in this life.

### The Pathway Out of the Pits

Christ is our refuge we can flee to Him at any time and in any condition—and He will never turn anyone away. So how did David get rescued from the pits? How did God lead him out? Here is the simple pathway recorded in this confession of God's faithfulness he made from the pits.

Now, let's go back over this Psalm and learn from each step David took as the Lord led him out of the pits.

1. **LIKE DAVID--REMEMBER GOD'S WORK IN YOUR LIFE.** David first notes the five ways God had worked in his life. Here is God's grace directed towards David—*Psalm 40:1-3 I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry. 2 He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps. 3 He has put a new song in my mouth— Praise to our God; Many will see it and fear, And will trust in the Lord.*

The first step out of the pits is to remember God's work in our lives. David remembers God's work in his life. Think back over your salvation experience. Repeat it to yourself, mull it over in your heart. Then think of the last time you cried to the Lord and He responded. Go over that in your mind—that is what David was doing!

***Don't be surprised by troubles.*** For a moment think who this is—David the man after God's heart. David the one Jesus is names after "Son of David" - and he had such a difficult life. Come to think of it, so did Moses, and Elijah, and Paul, and Peter—in fact, they all seem to have a hard life. If we look to the end of this Psalm we find in the conclusion the real goal God has for us. Real victory in life is not evading and escaping the majority of troubles that head our way. No, it is to seek that God be exalted through my life what ever He chooses to do with me and all my hard times.

Like David, we need to remember God's work of grace in our lives.

**2. LIKE DAVID--REAFFIRM YOUR TRUST IN GOD.** *Psalm 40:4-5 Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust, And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. 5 Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works Which You have done; And Your thoughts toward us Cannot be recounted to You in order; If I would declare and speak of them, They are more than can be numbered.*

David *verbally* says that he trusts God.

Sometimes we need to break the spiritual silence in our heart by *talking to God*. *Telling Him* what we know is true. *Preaching the Gospel* we believe—to ourselves! David reaffirmed his trust in God. Are you?

***Live with mysteries.*** We can't always know why God is allowing circumstances—but we do know we can trust Him to do all things well. Jesus said to His disciples in John 13:7, "*What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.*"

Like David, we need to reaffirm our trust in the Lord.

**3. LIKE DAVID—RENEW YOUR SUBMISSION TO GOD.** *Psalm 40:6-8 Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. 7 Then I said, "Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me. 8 I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart."*

Inviting God to open our ears is the key to submission with God. This is a dual analogy. Digging is a word for clearing away debris as well as deeply inscribing. These are the two steps to submission—clear out any hindrances that are in the way, and submit to the permanent marking of ownership.

What a beautiful way to look at hard times!

God is tunneling a well of water to refresh me; God is making room to bury into my life His greatest treasures. But that is not all that David shares with us from this time in the pits. There is another exciting picture for us of submission to God.

For us on this side of the cross--here is such a moving picture of what God wants from us. He invites us to become His Bondslaves, servants for life. If we are willing and so desire we declare

that publicly like Paul does so often. “I want to serve the Lord all my days”. Then we make some painful choices in life to limit our flesh, discipline our life, invest in the world to come instead of merely in this world. And when we make that offering of our lives that is reflected in Romans 12, it is a permanent service that goes through life and lasts forever.

*Living for Jesus through earth's little while,  
My dearest treasure, the light of His smile;  
Seeking the lost ones He died to redeem,  
Bringing the weary to find rest in Him.*

*O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee,  
For Thou, in Thy atonement, didst give Thyself for me.  
I own no other Master, my heart shall be Thy throne.  
My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ, for Thee alone.*

**Like David, we need to renew our submission to the Lord.**

**Accept your situation.** What is unchangeable must be accepted and lived through by God's grace. As Paul said, we must echo, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13)

**4. LIKE DAVID--REPEAT TRUTHS ABOUT GOD**—He is Righteous. *Psalm 40:9-12 I have proclaimed the good news of **righteousness** In the great assembly; Indeed, I do not restrain my lips, O Lord, You Yourself know. 10 I have not hidden **Your righteousness** within my heart; I have declared **Your faithfulness** and **Your salvation**; I have not concealed **Your loving kindness** and **Your truth** From the great assembly. 11 Do not withhold **Your tender mercies** from me, O Lord; Let **Your lovingkindness** and **Your truth** continually preserve me. 12 For innumerable evils have surrounded me; My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up; They are more than the hairs of my head; Therefore my heart fails me.*

As David looked back over his life of loneliness, desperation, sorrow and fear—he saw one truth most clearly, God is Righteous. The key New Testament book on righteousness is Romans[4]—mentioned 66 times we see God's righteousness and our need of it.

So David's life testifies to God's righteousness. God is always faithful and what He does is right! So David says God is righteous.

- God is righteous in my: Perilous years when I was a fugitive;
- God is righteous in my: Prosperous years when I was victorious in every battle and sat upon the Throne;
- God is righteous in my: Punitive years when I sinned and God had to chasten me;
- God is righteous in my: Peaceful years when I gathered treasures to build the Temple.

**Like David, we need to repeat truths about the Lord.**

**5. LIKE DAVID--REJOICE IN GOD EVEN IN THE PITS.** *Psalm 40:13-17 (=Psalm 70:2-5) Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me; O Lord, **make haste to help me!** 14 Let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion Who seek to destroy my life; Let them be driven backward and brought to dishonor Who wish me evil. 15 Let them be confounded because of their shame, Who say to me, "Aha, aha!" 16 Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; Let such as love Your salvation say continually, "The Lord be magnified!" 17 But I am poor and needy; Yet the Lord thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer; Do not delay, O my God.*

**Psalm 70** is the final Psalm from this time in David's life. It is reflective as he looks back on this time and shares the Lord!

- Psalm 70:1-5 Make haste, O God, to deliver me! Make haste to help me, O Lord! 2 Let them be ashamed and confounded Who seek my life; Let them be turned back and confused Who desire my hurt. 3 Let them be turned back because of their shame, Who say, "Aha, aha!" 4 **Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; And let those who love Your salvation say continually, "Let God be magnified!"** 5 But I am poor and needy; Make haste to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay.

***Cry to God when life is hollow.*** Life was so bad at this time that David says four times in verses 1, 5—make haste, come now, don't wait, hasten. He says Lord I am not going to make it in this job, this marriage, this family, this sickness, this disaster. Quickly come, I am sinking and am going to perish.

The bottom line of life is—who do you want to please? There are only two possible choices at the deepest level. Either we please God or we in one way or another are seeking to please ourselves. David wanted God to be pleased. It started way back in his youth as we saw in Psalm 19.

- *Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.*

David broke with the crowd, stopped getting and seeking approval from his peers and went straight to the top. He wanted God and God alone to be his goal. And that was still his desire.

One way or another we all get what we want in life. David wanted God. Do we? Really, down deep in your heart of hearts are you planning, figuring, calculating, scheming—how do give God more of your life? David was and did and look at him now—forever settled in Heaven as a man after God's own heart.

One final lesson--the message of Psalm 40 and 70 is summarized in one of Paul's most repeated exhortations, Philippians 4:6-7. If we could summarize these two verses they would say in the form of two imperatives: "**Worry about nothing; pray about everything!**"

David rejoiced in God. Are you? Troubles—yes; pessimism—no! Poor and needy—always!

## Like David, we need to rejoice in the Lord.

**6. LIKE DAVID--PRAY FOR OTHERS WHILE YOU GO THROUGH THE PITS.** Psalm 40:16-17 *Though we at times are desperate—God is not.* He knows what is coming before it ever starts. God is managing every detail. What does David do in verse 4? He prays for others who sought God. What does that say to us? When we are alone and struggling it is the perfect time to pray for others who may be going through what we are facing. Here is a simple plan we can remember:

- Are you sick? Then pray for others who are sick—you know what they are going through!
- Are you abused by co-workers, family members, or classmates? Then pray for others going through the same pains and hurts.
- Are you in a dead end job? Then pray for hope for others that also face the daily struggle of what to do to survive in the days ahead.
- Are you successful and tempted to be selfish? Then pray for others you know who are also experiencing prosperity and ask God to keep them from selfishness and pride.

## Like David, we need to intercede for others.

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[1] Sword of the Lord. <http://www.swordofthelord.com/biographies/bunyan.htm>

[2] Sproul, R. C., *The Soul's Quest for God*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1992.

[3] Sproul, R. C., *The Soul's Quest for God*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1992.

[4] In Romans Paul declares that God is righteous in the four key areas that matter for eternity: God is righteous in declaring us as hopeless in our **sin (1-2)**; God is righteous in providing for our **salvation (3-5, 9-11)**; God is righteous in demanding our **sanctification (6-8)**; God is righteous in bestowing gifts **for our service (12-16)**.

# Praying from the Pits

## COR: Message Eighteen (050904PM)

The last two steps in the pathway out of the pits of life are prayer and praise. Psalm 40 shows us that praying and praising gets us through the pits.

In fact if we back up through all we have seen so far—it all makes so much sense.

- When we pray we can praise;
- When we praise we can repeat truth about God;

- When we repeat truth about God we can renew our submission to God;
- When we renew our submission to God we can reaffirm our trust in Him;
- When we reaffirm our trust in Him we can remember His work in our life.

And back we go again to prayer, to praise and back through those six steps David captures for us in the pathway out of the pits. So the last two steps in the pathway out of the pits of life are praise and prayer.

To introduce Psalm 40, turn with me to I Thessalonians 5:16-18. What can God do with our hard times, lonely times, dark times and fearful times? He can use them if we give ourselves to Him. In fact, we can even begin to rejoice in the Goodness of God even in the darkest of circumstances. That is what David does in Psalm 40 and that is what Paul tells us by the power of the Holy Spirit—we all can do in every circumstance we find ourselves in through all of life.

- *1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

Does that work nowadays? The Psalms are 3,000 years old—do they still work? To find out, let's listen to a testimonial from none other than Paul, writer of half of the New Testament!

Psalm 40 is a song or Psalm written three thousand years ago by David as he faced the low point of his life. Now turn with me to Acts 16 and look at one of the low points of Paul's life. As we read, I want you to see the way that Paul dealt with the pits of life.

- *Acts 16:25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns (Greek hunmeo) to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.*

Isn't it interesting how many words we pulled right out of the Greek language into English? Hunmeo—what does that sound like? Hymns—they were singing hymns to God. And what is amazing is the prisoners were listening to them.

You say, "What were they singing?" We know what they were singing because hunmeo doesn't just mean randomly singing, it is the same word that is used at the Last Supper with Jesus Christ. It says in that Scripture that when they had sung a hymn (hunmeo) they went out. In the Greek language translating the Hebrew events that always means that they were singing from the Psalms.

Look at Psalm 113 with me because we know what Paul was singing in the prison. And I know, growing up for years, I wondered what would they have been singing? What songs were popular back then? Well, the word that is used tells us. That is one of the blessings of the Greek language—it gives us insights that we can enjoy even in English.

In Psalm 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118 and 136 were the "hunmeo" (hymns) that the Jews sang at special events. Remember they did not have the New Testament yet. This book of Acts is a very early part of the canon of the New Testament. The Gospels came later, most of them and Paul's

Epistles followed. So there is no New Testament—they don't have "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" yet. They are singing the Old Testament.

In Psalm 113 I want to show you how to praise the Lord even through the pain. Now I don't know what pain you are going through. You might be going through family pain, or social pain, or physical pain, emotional pain. You might be going through financial pain. You can sing through the pain if you get these words. You can imagine Paul bent over and bleeding in a dark stinky prison with no ventilation, no sanitary facilities, no pest removal service to kill all the vermin.

This is what Paul is singing:

- *Psalm 113:1-2 Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD, Praise the name of the LORD! <sup>2</sup>Blessed be the name of the LORD From this time forth and forevermore!*

Paul said I want to praise the Lord right now and always.

### ❖ **Point #1: Pray and Praise Consistently**

Do you know how to praise the Lord through pain? Praise Him when you are not in pain. Praise Him when things are going well. Praise Him right now before the pain starts and you will be able to praise Him always.

### ❖ **Point #2: Pray and Praise Systematically**

Again in this Psalm note another truth.

*Psalm 113:3a "From the rising of the sun to its going down "*

Don't just praise Him sporadically, praise Him not only right now and all the time but praise Him through out the day. Don't compartmentalize your life. Don't say my life belongs to the company I work for and God gets Sunday. Praise Him from the rising of the sun to it's going down. So not only now and always, but all day long.

### ❖ **Point #3: Pray and Praise Reverently**

- *Psalm 113:3b "The LORD's name is to be praised.*

Focus on God's immutable character. God does not change. My circumstances do. My conditions do. My life changes. My health changes. My "ups and downs" come and go. But God is always the same.

You know, most of us live between downs and ups. Aunt Mary died- we are down. But Aunt Mary left us and inheritance- we are up. We hope to settle in between. Praise not what I am going through, not what I feel right now, not what I hope is going to happen. Praise something

that is changeless. “The Lord’s name is to be praised.” God is immutable. His Word does not change, his character does not change, His Christ does not change. God does not change.

#### ❖ **Point #4: Pray and Praise Confidently**

- *Psalm 113:4-5 The Lord is high above all nations, His glory above the heavens. 5 Who is like the Lord our God, Who dwells on high,*

How do you sing through pain?

- By realizing that God is sovereignly in control.
- By believing He is omnipotently able to take me right out of the prison of my pain if He wants to. If I am in it, I need to be in it because it is part of his plan.
- By trusting that He is in control, He is higher than the doctors and the politicians and the business owners and the tax collectors or whoever is on you right now. He is not only in control, He is the greatest, He is above them all.
- By adoring Him as majestic, He is awesome, He is beyond our comprehension and He wants us to know about Him and sometimes that is why we go through pain. If life is all perfect and good we would not have time for Him. That is why He sends pain and suffering into our lives. That’s why He sends those events that are so hard to understand because we need to come to Him if we cannot understand them. If we cannot endure them, if we cannot make it through, we need to come to the One who is higher than us. That is what He wants us to focus on in our pain.

#### ❖ **Point #5: Pray and Praise Humbly**

- *Psalm 113:6 Who humbles Himself to behold The things that are in the heavens and in the earth?*

He is in touch with us. This verse says that He bows down His ear to hear. He opens His eyes to behold what is going on in our lives. He is the One who wants to get our attention. That is what Paul is singing about down in the prison.

Can you imagine him down there in the stocks, bleeding, bugs crawling on him, saying “God is in control, God knows all things, He owns all things, He can set me free in an instant if He wants to. Wait a minute, we haven’t come to the end of the story because it is going to happen.

#### ❖ **Point #6: Pray and Praise Meditatively**

What was Paul meditating upon in his prison cell? He is pondering the compassion of our Great God.

- *Psalm 113:7-9 He raises the poor out of the dust, And lifts the needy out of the ash heap, 8 That He may seat him with princes—With the princes of His people. 9 He grants the barren woman a home, Like a joyful mother of children. Praise the Lord!*

There aren't many things that are as strong as a woman's desire to have children but cannot. They will go to any length-- they will go to a fertility doctor, they will take all the tests, they will be totally uncomfortable and go through all the ups and downs and hopes.

Do you know what this Psalm says? **He will satisfy even the deepest needs.** You cannot think of a deeper need than that of a woman who wants to be a mother. "He grants the barren woman a home, like a joyful mother of children." Praise the Lord.

Now, in the Hebrew economy, there was no higher or greater desire than to have children. Then, your worth was in your children. What a wonder it was to have children. God says that a Godly woman's worth is in raising and cultivating Godly children. If God does not give physical children, He says you ought to have spiritual children.

But what we see here in the 9<sup>th</sup> verse of the 113<sup>th</sup> Psalm is that the God who is the God that were to praise now and always and the God that we are to praise from the sunrise to the sunset is to be our focus.

Focus on His immutable character,

- He is in control,
- He is the greatest,
- He is majestic, awesome,
- He is in touch,
- He is compassionate,
- He can satisfy our deepest needs what ever they are.

We could do this through all those Psalms (113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118 and 136). God is the one who can help us to sing through our pain.

### **What is the lesson?**

1. We can sing through pain. How? By focusing on the eternal, changeless God.
2. By praising Him now when things are not bad and always.
3. By praising Him all day long,
  - Praising Him because He is the greatest
  - Praising Him because He is in control
  - Realize that He can satisfy the deepest needs of our heart

That is the God that wants to take us through pain and suffering. Not remove us from it, but let us learn through it.

"It is Well With My Soul" by Horatio G. Spafford.

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Refrain

It is well, with my soul,  
It is well, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

## The Pathway Out of the Pits

Now, let's go back over this Psalm and learn from each step David took as the Lord led him out of the pits.

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The first step out of the pits is to remember God's work in our lives. Like David, we need to remember God's work of grace in our lives.

2. **LIKE DAVID--REAFFIRM YOUR TRUST IN GOD.** *Psalm 40:4-5 Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust, And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. 5 Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works Which You have done; And Your thoughts toward us Cannot be recounted to You in order; If I would declare and speak of them, They are more than can be numbered.*

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Sometimes we need to break the spiritual silence in our heart by *talking to God*. Telling Him what we know is true. *Preaching the Gospel* we believe—to ourselves! David reaffirmed his trust in God. Are you?

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O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee,  
For Thou, in Thy atonement, didst give Thyself for me.  
I own no other Master, my heart shall be Thy throne.  
My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ, for Thee alone.

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As David looked back over his life of loneliness, desperation, sorrow and fear—he saw one truth most clearly, God is Righteous. So David’s life testifies to God’s righteousness. God is always faithful and what He does is right!

Like David, we need to repeat truths about the Lord.

**5. LIKE DAVID--REJOICE IN GOD EVEN IN THE PITS.** *Psalm 40:13-17 (Psalm 70:2-5) Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me; O Lord, make haste to help me! 14 Let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion Who seek to destroy my life; Let them be driven backward and brought to dishonor Who wish me evil. 15 Let them be confounded because of their shame, Who say to me, “Aha, aha!” 16 Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; Let such as love Your salvation say continually, “The Lord be magnified!” 17 But I am poor and needy; Yet the Lord thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer; Do not delay, O my God.*

**Psalm 70** is the final Psalm from this time in David’s life. It is reflective as he looks back on this time and shares Lord!

- Psalm 70:1-5 Make haste, O God, to deliver me! Make haste to help me, O Lord! 2 Let them be ashamed and confounded Who seek my life; Let them be turned back and confused Who desire my hurt. 3 Let them be turned back because of their shame, Who say, “Aha, aha!” 4 **Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; And let those who love Your salvation say continually, “Let God be magnified!”** 5 But I am poor and needy; Make haste to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay.

***Cry to God when life is hollow.*** Life was so bad at this time that David says four times in verses 1, 5—make haste, come now, don't wait, hasten. He says Lord I am not going to make it in this job, this marriage, this family, this sickness, this disaster. Quickly come, I am sinking and am going to perish.

One final lesson--the message of Psalm 40 and 70 is summarized in one of Paul's most repeated exhortations, Philippians 4:6-7. If we could summarize these two verses they would say in the form of two imperatives: "***Worry about nothing; pray about everything!***"

David rejoiced in God. Are you?

Troubles—yes; pessimism—no!

Poor and needy—always!

Like David, we need to rejoice in the Lord.

**6. LIKE DAVID--PRAY FOR OTHERS WHILE YOU GO THROUGH THE PITS.** Psalm 40:16-17 Remember that *Psalm 40:13-17 (Psalm 70:2-5) 16 Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; Let such as love Your salvation say continually, "The Lord be magnified!" 17 But I am poor and needy; Yet the Lord thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer; Do not delay, O my God.*

***Though we at times are desperate—God is not.*** He knows what is coming before it ever starts. God is managing every detail. What does David do in verse 4? He prays for others who sought God.

- *Psalm 40:4 Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust, And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.*

What does that say to us? When we are alone and struggling it is the perfect time to pray for others who may be going through what we are facing. Here is a simple plan we can remember:

- Are you sick? Then pray for others who are sick—you know what they are going through!
- Are you abused by co-workers, family members, or classmates? Then pray for others going through the same pains and hurts.
- Are you in a dead end job? Then pray for hope for others that also face the daily struggle of what to do to survive in the days ahead.
- Are you successful and tempted to be selfish? Then pray for others you know who are also experiencing prosperity and ask God to keep them from selfishness and pride.

Like David, we need to intercede for others.

- **AS YOU PRAY—FEEL ANOTHER'S PAIN.** (Strong's #4834 *sumpatheo* 'feel together with'; # 835 *sumpasko* 'to experience the same thing'; this is our shared concern

or sympathy) *1 Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous;*

- **AS YOU PRAY—REMEMBER YOU SERVE THE SAME MASTER.** (Strong's # 4889 *sundoulos* 'sharing same master' (not service) this is our shared master.) *Colossians 1:7 as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf; Colossians 4:7 Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me.*
- **AS YOU PRAY—REMEMBER YOU ARE HEADED TO THE SAME DESTINATION.** Sumpolites = **fellow citizens** (Phil. 3) Philippians 3:20-21 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. **Fellow citizens** Eph 2:19 > Phil 3:20 = our shared rules of conduct; #4847-sumpolities(n) Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, Politeuomai (v) Acts 23:1 Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." ; Ph 1:27 Let your conversation be Politeuma(n) Ph 3:20 For our community(lit) is in heaven; Polites = citizen of same town
- **AS YOU PRAY—REMEMBER YOU WORK ON THE SAME CREW.** Sumergoi = **fellow workers** (Rom. 16) Romans 16:3, 9, 21 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. 21 Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you. **Fellow Workers** Rom. 16:3,9,21 Our shared labor union. Sunergos(adj) Rom 16:3,9,21 My---; I Cor 3:9 We are---with God working w/God; 1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. II Cor 1:24 Are---of your joy produces joy in church; 2 Corinthians 1:24 Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.; II Cor 8:23 My partner and ---concerning you; 2 Corinthians 8:23 If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ; Phil 2:25 My brother and --- lifts lowly work to the high calling; Philippians 2:25 Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; Phil 4:3 Other My --- Reflects on our eternal design; Philippians 4:3 And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life; Col 4:11 Focus on kingdom tasks; Colossians 4:11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me; 1Th 3:2, Phile 1, 24; 3J8 - Laboring for truth; 1 Thessalonians 3:2 and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith; Philemon 1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer; Philemon 24 as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.
- **AS YOU PRAY—REMEMBER YOU SHARE THE SAME PARTNERSHIP.** Sumkoinonia = **fellow partners; Fellow Partners/Partakers** Phil. 1:7 = Our Shared

Fellowship *Sugkoinoonos*(n); Eph 5:11 Have no - w/the unfruitful works neg sin; Ephesians 5:11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.; Phil 1:7 You were --- in defense and conf pos grace; Philippians 1:7 just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. ; Rev 18:4 Be not --- of her sin; Revelation 18:4 And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.

- **AS YOU PRAY—REMEMBER WE STRUGGLE WITH THE SAME THINGS.**  
Our Shared Struggle *Sunagonidzomai* Romans 15:30 Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, *Sunathleo* Philippians 1:27 Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, Philippians 4:3 And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.
  - **AS YOU PRAY—ASK FOR STRENGTH FOR ANOTHER’S WEAKNESSES.**  
(Strong’s #4837 *sumparakaleo* ‘to console jointly’; this is our shared encouragement.)  
***Romans 1:12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.*** It is the Spirit empower desire and action to – Draw near to God through His Word. The Spirit of God is our PARAKLESIS (#3874) as seen in Acts 13:15 “word of exhortation” is speaking God’s word.
1. **By personal ministry in the power of Holy Spirit.** Romans 12:8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.
  2. **By the powerful ministry of God’s Word.** Romans 15:4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.
  3. **By the powerful consolation that comes from God.** Romans 15:5 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus,

## David’s Life of Finding Refuge

### COR: Message Nineteen (050911AM)

Sometimes its good to pull over and look at the map. Just to see where you are, where you're headed, and how far you have come. This morning we are on a wonderful journey finding all the sites in God's Word where Christ is our refuge. We arrived at the third truth—Christ the Refuge for the Lonely.

Then we began to look at David. We have found that David's life is often described in the Bible. But is there any significance to the items about David captured in the Old Testament?

To find out, open with me to Ruth 4 this morning and look at the last verse. I'd like to show you the person God chose to write about more than any other person in the Bible.

Yes, I know that Christ is the theme of every chapter and every book of this Bible. But the most described and talked about person in God's Word is David. His strengths, weaknesses, virtues and vices, character and habits are all there—more than any other person.

## David God's Example to Us

I believe that God captured David's highs and lows for our benefit. God records his successes and failures for our learning. And all that is because God is teaching us how to please Him by the correct responses to our circumstances in life.

David has been recorded by God in His Word as an example to us in how to find all we need in Jesus—no matter we ever will face in life, David mirrors a response that pleases God that we can follow.

As we start here in Ruth 4 and go through all the chapters that deal with David's life we find that there are over 140 chapters of the Bible about David. That is astounding. Let me show them to you. Here is the first mention of David.

As we turn to 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 16, we see the first appearance of David in God's Word.

God always has the best plans and will show us what they are if we listen and obey Him.

Whether in the background or foreground all the way from 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 16.1 and God's command to Samuel the prophet through David's death in 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 2.11--we find David everywhere in these .

Now turn to 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 2.11 and pick up with David, the 7<sup>th</sup> born son (2.15) of Jesse. In 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 3.1-9 we find David's sons. David is also mentioned in 4.31; 6.31; 7.2; and 9.22 and from 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 10-29 he is everywhere again. So far that is 48 chapters of the Bible. When we add in the 73 known Psalms that gives David at least 141 chapters that contain his life.

So God devotes 141 chapters—more than for any other person, to David's life. How much coverage does God give others in His Word[1]. In the scope of portraits recorded in the Scriptures here are the statistics for the six most described people in God's Word.

1. **David** (141 chapters) appears in Ruth 4 (1), 1 Sam. 16-1 Kings 2 (42), 1 Chronicles 2-4, 6-7, 9-29 (25), Psalms (73). In I Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22 he the man after God's own heart. Mentioned by name 1,085 times.

2. **MOSES** (136 chapters) appears from Exodus 2-40 (38), Leviticus 1 through Deuteronomy 34 (97), and in Psalm 90 (1). The name Moses is recorded 848 times in the Bible.
3. **Jesus Christ our Lord** (105 chapters) is written about in all the Gospels (89), has letters in Rev. 1-3 (3), ascends in Acts 1 and speaks to Paul in Acts 9 and 27 (3). The name of Jesus is recorded 983 times in the Bible.
4. **Paul** (104 chapters) is recorded from Acts 9 through Philemon (104) = 104 Chapters. The name Paul is recorded 157 times.
5. **John** (102 chapters) is written about in half the chapters of the Synoptic Gospels (44), in Acts 1-8 (8), in Revelation and his Epistles (29), and the Gospel by John (21). The name John occurs 131 times in God's Word.
6. **Peter** (65 chapters) is recorded by the Gospels in about half the chapters (45), Acts 1-8, 10-12, 15 (12), and the Epistles of Peter (8). The name Peter occurs 158 times in God's Word.

All that to say that, the most talked about, the most portrayed, the most described example for us in all of God's Word is-David.

So it would be good to stop and get the big picture of his life as recorded in God's Word all over again. This is a time to jot notes in your Bible or take some extra notes and just see the whole scope of the dealings of the Lord with this special servant he called the man after His own heart!

## **FIRST WE FIND DAVID'S PSALMS FROM HIS EARLY YEARS**

- **David suffers the intense loneliness of family disappointments—and from these times he grows in his relationship with the Lord.** His testimony from his early years is captured in Psalms 19 and 23. In First Samuel 16 David is the shepherd boy writing **Psalms 19 and 23**. David was overlooked, ignored and even disliked by his family in **First Samuel 16-18**. He is left out of family gatherings, unrecognized for great achievements and basically left alone much of the time to do his "job" with the family's flock of sheep. David found God was with him while alone as a young shepherd boy writing **Psalms 19 and 23**. He had many a lonely night in the fields, the woods and the hill sides of Judea. Instead of hating and fleeing those lonely times, he turned them into meditations upon the faithfulness of God.

1. ***Psalm 19 has three basic lessons:*** v. 1-6 explains that David meditated upon the character of God when he was alone; v. 7-11 explains that David listened to the Word of God when he was alone; v. 12-14 explains that David feared the disapproval God (heeded His Word) when he was alone.

2. ***Psalm 23 is the testimony of what you can learn about God in times of loneliness.*** Listen to David's testimony of what he experienced, what he clung to from his long dark nights, and long lonely days. As you listen, ask the Lord to give you the same desire, then echo each of David's

affirmations and make them your own testimony. Confess these loneliness lessons and find them true!

- **David faces and wins an immense spiritual confrontation. Goliath is not just an enemy warrior—he is defying God.**

1. In **First Samuel 17:4, 57-58** David is the giant killer and writes **Psalm 8**. We believe this because in the most ancient Jewish Targums (paraphrases of the Hebrew Old Testament into Aramaic from the time of Ezra onward)—specifically point this 8<sup>th</sup> Psalm as being about David and Goliath.

2. The words in the manuscripts before Psalm 9 are actually the ending of Psalm 8. Muthlabben means 'death of champion' and was paraphrased in the Targums referring to David's killing the 'man of the space between the camps' in **1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 17.4**. That no mans land was dominated by Goliath and was conquered by David.

3. Much like Satan was defeated by Christ's coming to earth. David may have sung this Psalm while in Saul's court to comfort him when the demons troubled him.

- **David explains his habits as a young man that fortified him for Goliath, a life of hardship and for being so useful to God.** He explains this in **Psalm 132** which records how David started walking with the Lord as a young boy. This may be David's confession after being anointed King by Samuel (1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 16.13) and looking back and remembering God's Hand on his life. This Psalm may be written in his youth as a resolve for his young years or later when he starts his career as King—as a testimony of God's faithfulness in the past and a reaffirmation of his consecration to the Lord. Some key truths from this Psalm are:

1. This psalm could be called *David's spiritual secret*—what made him the Giant that we see him to be from the Scriptural record of his life.

2. David **put God ahead of comfort** in v. 3-5. He made time for God a holy habit in his life. Is it yet for you? Without regular, consistent, disciplines time alone with God—you and I will never amount to anything for eternity!

3. David also **personally longed for God** as a young shepherd boy. His family probably kept the Sabbath and the Feasts—but David had an internal, personal longing inside of his own heart for the Lord. Do you? Or is it just your parents that make you come and read and serve? Is it just your family or husband or wife that keeps you kind of going? Reality in spiritual life only comes when it is personal longing from your heart for God.

4. David wanted to be **clothed with righteousness** in v. 9a. That means he wanted to live the Lord's way as much as possible. Consecration to the Lord was a choice. He wanted to come before the Lord like a holy priest. And isn't that what God says we are to be—his holy priesthood that spend our life bringing Him offerings of worship and deeds of sacrificial service? Are you clothed with consecrated righteousness and living each day as a priest?

5. David **engaged in corporate worship** in v. 9b. Note the plural ‘saints’. He was personally a seeker of the Lord and that made him come into the congregation of saints with such a zeal he wanted to ‘shout’ to the Lord. This verse is repeated as v. 16. Do you engage in corporate worship? Does your heart shout? Does your face radiate a deep love for the Lord or a distracted, disconnected air of indifference to the times we join our hearts in worship to the Lord God Almighty?

- **David also had made some vows for personal conduct and consecration.** These resolves (much like Jonathan Edwards) are captured in **Psalm 101** which can be called David’s pact for purity. He fled to the Lord as his refuge from sins of his youth. This Psalm may be written in his youth as a resolve for his young years or later when he starts his career as King—as a testimony of God’s faithfulness in the past and a reaffirmation of his consecration to the Lord. Some key truths from this Psalm are:

1. The *pathway to a godly life* contains personal choices or resolves of holiness to God. Note the seven “I wills” (2a, 2b, 3a, 4b, 5b, 5c, 8a).
2. David **sought personal integrity** as his goal v.2b.
3. David **made a personal pact of purity** for his life and conduct v. 3a.
4. David had a **habit of scraping off anything displeasing to the Lord from his life** (like coming in from the horse barn; like barnacles on a boat; like taking a shower before a date) in v. 3b.
5. David **chose to limit his exposure to evil** and things that would displease the Lord in v. 4-5. He specifically says any sin I will not look at (v. 3 ‘nothing wicked before my eyes’ and v. 4b ‘not know [experience for myself] wickedness’).
6. David **sought to always have proper heroes** to look up to and emulate in v. 6a.
7. David had a **life long plan to purge evil** from being around his life and acceptable in his presence v. 8. (Like Paul having the Ephesians burn anything to do with Satan—so we must not have pornographic or occultic books, videos, games, and music in our homes, cars, computers, lives or minds.)

## THEN WE FIND DAVID’S SONGS FROM HIS STRUGGLING YEARS

- **David suffers intense loneliness as he faces family conflict and danger.** In **I Sam 19:11** as Saul tries to murder him, David writes **Psalm 59**. These times of danger are from his boss and father-in-law King Saul. Instead of being eaten up by the intense loneliness he must have felt with job and family pressures all dumped on him at once—he expresses his needs to God. His prayerful responses to these tough times are captured in the Psalms and show a pathway through loneliness to the One who is closest of all. In that time of feeling so alone David writes **Psalm 59**—how to overcome the feelings of

loneliness when we are in danger. David finds an *unshakeable trust in God's protection*. Some key truths from this Psalm are:

1. David turns to God in his fearful times v.1.
  2. David trusts God in his fearful times v.9.
  3. David triumphs through God in his fearful times v. 16.
- **David learns to live with fear as he is a newlywed and faces the unpredictable outbursts of deadly rage from Saul.** In **First Samuel 20:35-42** as Jonathan warns him of the danger of Saul's wrath, David writes **Psalms 11 and 64**.

1. **Psalm 11** is a meditation on why David should not just run away from dangers—he needed to run to the Lord first.

2. **Psalm 64** is the Psalm about the poison of jealous, hateful, and hurtful tongues. After David's meteoric rise to giant slayer, King's helper, royal son-in-law and commander—there were many who hated and envied him. God shows him how to deal with poisonous language directed at him. This could be in the time of Saul or also in the time of Absalom's rebellion and the evil accusations of Ahithophel and Shimei (2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 15-19)

- **David suffers intense loneliness as he loses his job, and is separated from his family.** David writes **Psalm 52**—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are away from our work, home, and family. In **First Samuel 21:1-9** as he flees to Ahimelech the priest, David writes this Psalm. Some key truths from this Psalm are:
  1. v. 1      God is good no matter what!
  2. v. 2-4    People will always hurt us.
  3. v. 5-7    Take God as your strength in times like this.
  4. v. 8-9    Wait for God, cling to Him, grow through the alone time!
- **David is captured and goes from fear to terror to nearly a complete breakdown because of fear.**

1. In 1 Sam. 21:10-12 when David is captured at Gath he writes about this in **Psalm 56**. In this Psalm David is confident (Ps. 56:9)! Why! “THIS I KNOW THAT GOD IS FOR ME”. He confesses a **distinct impression God is on his side!**

- **Seek God.**
- **Cry out to Him.** Four times in three verses (v. 4, 10-11) David cries to Elohim—the Creator of the dove and everything else!
- **Remember His closeness in alone times.** This Psalm was very popular. Psalm 56 is quoted by the writer of Hebrews 13:6 (Psalm 56:4, 11); by Paul in Romans 8:31 (Psalm 56:9); and most of all by Jesus Himself in John 8:12.
- **Remember that God cares.** The tears in the bottle phrase speaks loudly of God's promise to never leave us, never forget us, and we are not to fear what man can do to us.

2. But as the time goes on his confidence fades and in 1 Sam. 21:13-15 we see him go into a terrible time of fear. Yet as he looks back on this dark hour he writes **Psalm 34**. In this Psalm we see David magnifying God. Because of his **unwavering awareness God was watching**.

- Psalm 34:3 Oh, magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together. [*he gives glory to God*]
- Psalm 34:4 I sought the LORD, [*even in tough times he always sought for God*]
- Psalm 34:6 This poor man cried out, [*During tough times he had a proper view of himself; he was poor in spirit as Christ would later say.*]
- Psalm 34:8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD [is] good; [*he had a personal experience of God*] Blessed [is] the man [who] trusts in Him!
- Psalm 34:9 Oh, fear the LORD, [*During tough times he practiced the presence of God, acknowledging Him is to fear him. it changed his behavior. If we believe right we will behave right!*]
- Psalm 34:15 The eyes of the LORD [are] on the righteous, [*During tough times he knew he was in touch with God*]
- Psalm 34:22 The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, And none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned. [*During tough times the cross is the ultimate refuge*] (NKJV)

**David left Gath and was so alone that he despairs. And now David feels abandoned as moves to a new location that is very foreign to him.** David wrote **Psalm 13**—how to overcome the feelings of despair, abandonment and loneliness when we are in a very dark situation that seems hopeless.

1. **My life feels like an endless struggle.** *Psalm 13:1a How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever?* By repeating himself four times he shows how deep this feeling runs. **What David says is, “I just can’t go on.”**

2. **My life seems to have lost God’s blessing.** *Psalm 13:1b How long will You hide Your face from me?* David saw a lack of the apparent blessing on God. **My family doesn’t seem blessed anymore. My work doesn’t seem blessed anymore. My ministry doesn’t seem blessed anymore. My spiritual life doesn’t seem blessed anymore.** **What David says is, “I don’t SEE YOU anymore in my home, my work, or my life.”**

3. **My mind seems so troubled.** *Psalm 13:2a How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart daily?* David said that he had dark thoughts and uncontrolled emotions. **What David says is, “I can’t stop these feelings of dejection and abandonment.”**

4. **My life seems to have lost God’s victory.** *Psalm 13:2b How long will my enemy be exalted over me?* **What David says is, “I am constantly defeated.”**

- **David feels intensely alone as moves to a new location that is very foreign to him.** In First Samuel 21:11 as he fled from Saul to the Philistine city of Gath, David wrote **Psalms 40 and 70**—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in a new situation that is very foreign situation. And in these Psalms he gives the pathway out of

the pit that end with praising from the pits and praying from the pits. **The Pathway out of the Pits**

1. **LIKE DAVID--REMEMBER GOD'S WORK IN YOUR LIFE.** David first notes the five ways God had worked in his life. Here is God's grace directed towards David—*Psalm 40:1-3* The first step out of the pits is to remember God's work in our lives. Like David, we need to remember God's work of grace in our lives.

2. **LIKE DAVID--REAFFIRM YOUR TRUST IN GOD.** *Psalm 40:4-5* David verbally says that he trusts God. Like David, we need to reaffirm our trust in the Lord.

3. **LIKE DAVID—RENEW YOUR SUBMISSION TO GOD.** *Psalm 40:6-8* What a beautiful way to look at hard times! God is tunneling a well of water to refresh me; God is making room to bury into my life His greatest treasures.

4. **LIKE DAVID--REPEAT TRUTHS ABOUT GOD—**He is Righteous. *Psalm 40:9-12.* Like David, we need to repeat truths about the Lord.

5. **LIKE DAVID--REJOICE IN GOD EVEN IN THE PITS.** *Psalm 40:13-17 (Psalm 70:2-5)* Like David, we need to rejoice in the Lord.

6. **LIKE DAVID--PRAY FOR OTHERS WHILE YOU GO THROUGH THE PITS.** *Psalm 40:16-17*

- **David suffers intense loneliness as he lives and works with a tough crowd.** David wrote more Psalms in this period than at any other time in his life. These *cave Psalms are 4, 57, 141-142*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are far from home and feel exiled. In First Samuel 22:1-2 as he moved into a cave at Adullam with an incredibly difficult group of men, David wrote more Psalms than at any other time in his life. These cave Psalms are 4, 57, 141-142.

1. In **Psalm 142** We see David calling on God because of his **unfailing hope God was listening and hearing.**

2. We find in 1 Sam. 24:16-22 the context for **Psalm 57**. Here we see David rising above discouragement by **applying his great discoveries about God** he learned in Psalm 142.

- **David suffers the intense loneliness of unemployment and unsettled home life.** David takes time to write *Psalms 17 and 63*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are insecure. This was a time of no sure place to live, no reliable source of income and provision. In First Samuel 22:5 and 23:14-16 as he was hiding from Saul in the Wilderness of Hareth, David takes time to write Psalms 17 and 63. 1 Sam. 23:13-14 > Ps. 63 We see David seeking God. Why? **ABUNDANT SATISFACTION GOD REFRESHED HIM.** Psalm 63 may have been in his time of fleeing Absalom as also are Psalms 3, 4, 5, and 63. Some truths from Psalm 63: v.4 worked for God; v. 5 witnessed God; v. 6-7 waited for God; and v. 8 walked with God.

- **David suffers the intense loneliness when betrayed by friends.** David writes *Psalms 7, 31, 35-36, and 54* as he records his heart on how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are betrayed by those we trusted as friends. In First Samuel 23:10-13 as he escapes from Saul at Keilah and goes into hiding in the mountains of Ziph, David writes Psalms 31 and 54. 1 Sam. 23:19-25 > Ps. 54 We see David finding refuge in God. Why? CONSTANTLY SETTING GOD BEFORE HIMSELF v. 30. In First Samuel 23:29 as he hides in the cave at En-gedi, David writes Psalms 35-36. In First Samuel 24:1-16 after he spares the life of his mortal enemy King Saul, David records his heart in Psalm 7. Psalm 7 may also refer to other Benjamite adversaries such as Shimei and Sheba both who hated and attacked David.
- **David suffers the intense loneliness when wronged in a business deal.** David writes *Psalm 53*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in danger of bitterness over being hurt in a business deal. In First Samuel 25 in the Wilderness of Paran as he faces the danger of his anger toward Nabal “the fool” and as God delivers him, David writes Psalm 53. The key to this Psalm is the word fool which in Hebrew is Nabal (15 times in this Psalm and 15 times in the account of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 25).
- **David suffers the intense loneliness of the complete loss of his family, friends, and finances—and finds hope in the Lord in this dark hour.** David writes *Psalms 16*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we suffer the loss of family, or friends, or finances—or even all three at once. Finally in First Samuel 27 as he is grieved and endangered over the raid on his family and city of Ziklag, David writes Psalms 16 and mirrors the wording of his plea to Saul in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 26.19-20. So it seems that Psalm 16 is written after this event with Saul and the key is seen in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 30.6b when David ‘strengthened himself in **the Lord his God**’. That was the One he had entrusted with his life. Psalm 16:11 You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Psalm 16 is a Michtam or an engraved Psalm. Michtam speaks of something so special it can’t merely be written on the surface like a pen on paper, it must be engraved like a chisel into stone to preserve it. So these truths were engraved into David’s heart and life—he knew that God would show him, lead him, and give him the promises of His Word. There are actually six Michtams (Psalms 16, 56-60) all of which come from the furnace of affliction surrounding Saul’s hunting down David to destroy him.

## NEXT WE FIND DAVID’S TESTIMONY OF GOD’S CLOSENESS DURING LIFE AS DAVID WAS IN HIS PEAK OR HIS STRONG YEARS

- *Psalm 132* may be David’s confession after being anointed King by Samuel and looking back and remembering God’s Hand on his life.
- *Psalm 101* was David’s pact for purity. He fled to the Lord as his refuge from sins of his youth.
- *David feels the loneliness of those struggling years of unending work in his career.* David writes of his desires to serve the Lord as he enters his career as King David over Israel. He writes *Psalm 15, 24, 68 and 101* in this time. II Samuel 6.

1. One special note on the Psalms is the usage of the Psalms in the daily Temple worship from Solomon’s time through the time of Christ. Here are the Psalms that were sung[2] each day at the

Temple: Sunday—Psalm 24. Monday—Psalm 48. Tuesday—Psalm 82. Wednesday—Psalm 94. Thursday—Psalm 81. Friday—Psalm 93. Saturday—the Sabbath Psalm 92.

2. Psalm 15 seems to be the outline Jesus used for the Sermon on the Mount. That sermon follows quite closely<sup>[3]</sup> the flow of this Psalm.

- **David suffers the intense loneliness of temptation and failure.** David writes *Psalm 32*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are tempted and fail. From the depths of conviction after his fall into sin with Bathsheba, 2 Samuel 11; David writes Psalm 32. and 38?
- **David suffers the intense loneliness of chastisement and restoration.** David writes *Psalm 51*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are chastened by the Lord and restored. From the pain of chastisement that leads to repentance and restoration, 2 Samuel 12; David sings of his faithful God in Psalm 51.
- And finally, at the end of his magnificent career, David extolls his Master and King in **Psalm 18**. Especially note his life long praise to God in Psalm 18:46 The Lord lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let the God of my salvation be exalted. 2 Sam. 5:17-25 - 2 Sam. 22 > Ps. 18. We find David triumphing over all enemies! Why? SEEING LIFE FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE, And what might that be? Psalm 18 tells us: v.1-3 God is greatest attraction; v. 4-6 We are in desperate condition; v. 7-15 God is awesome; v. 16-24 It is God who rescues; v. 25-29 God is just; v. 30-36 God reveals Himself; v. 37-45 God conquers enemies; v. 46-50 God is to be praised. This Psalm is in God's Word twice. Once at David's coronation and then again at the close of his life—it was like a way of saying that he wanted to start his career right and end it well for the Lord!

## FINALLY WE FIND DAVID'S SONGS FROM HIS CLOSING YEARS

- Finally We Find David's Testimony Of God's Closeness During His Old Age or His Waning Years. **David faces the loneliness of old age.** David writes *Psalm 71 and 116*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are old, weak, and leave behind our health, comfort, friends, family, and security. Psalm 70 is the intro to Psalm 71 in the Hebrew Bible and Psalm 70 is the last five verses of Psalm 40. So we conclude that Psalm 71 is David's prayer and testimony of how to be a godly man to the end of life.

1. **David suffers the intense loneliness when betrayed by friends.** In First Samuel 23:10-13 as he escapes from Saul at Keilah and goes into hiding in the mountains of Ziph, David writes *Psalms 31 and 54*.

2. **David suffers the intense loneliness of unemployment and unsettled home life.** In First Samuel 22:5 and 23:14-16 as he was hiding from Saul in the Wilderness of Hareth, David takes time to write *Psalms 17 and 63*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are insecure. This was a time of no sure place to live, no reliable source of income and provision.

3. In First Samuel 23:29 as he hides in the cave at En-gedi, David writes *Psalms 35-36*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are betrayed.

4. In First Samuel 24:1-16 after he spares the life of his mortal enemy King Saul, David records his heart in *Psalm 7*.

5. **David suffers the intense loneliness when wronged in business.** In First Samuel 25 in the Wilderness of Paran as he faces the danger of his anger toward Nabal “the fool” and as God delivers him, David writes *Psalm 53*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in danger of bitterness.

6. **David suffers the intense loneliness of the complete loss of his family, friends, and finances.** Finally in First Samuel 27 as he is grieved and endangered over the raid on his family and city of Ziklag, David writes *Psalms 16, 38 and 39*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in threat of loss.

7. **David suffers the intense loneliness of temptation and failure.** From the depths of conviction after his fall into sin with Bathsheba in II Samuel 11, David writes *Psalm 32*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are tempted and fail.

8. **David suffers the intense loneliness of chastisement and restoration.** From the pain of chastisement that leads to repentance and restoration in II Samuel 12, David sings of his faithful God in *Psalm 51*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in chastisement and restoration.

## **Finally We Find David’s Testimony of God’s Closeness During His Old Age or His Waning Years**

9. **David suffers the intense loneliness of old age.** And finally, at the end of his magnificent life, David extolls his Master and King in *Psalm 18*—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are in our last days before death. Especially note his life long praise to God in Psalm 18:46 The Lord lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let the God of my salvation be exalted.

- Let’s do something this week: 1. Be concerned for God’s honor - stand alone; 2. Trust God’s protection: don’t fear; 3. Realize God is on your side - you are valuable; 4. Remember God’s watching - fear God; 5. Expect God to hear : pray; 6. Be satisfied in God’s refreshment : seek Him; 7. Set God first: deny self; 8. Apply God’s great truth - live it

The bottom line of life is—who do you want to please? There are only two possible choices at the deepest level. Either we please God or we in one way or another are seeking to please ourselves. David wanted God to be pleased. It started way back in his youth as we saw in Psalm 19.

- *Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.*

David broke with the crowd, stopped getting and seeking approval from his peers and went straight to the top. He wanted God and God alone to be his goal. And that was still his desire.

One way or another we all get what we want in life. David wanted God. Do we? Really, down deep in your heart of hearts are you planning, figuring, calculating, scheming—how do give God more of your life? David was and did and look at him now—forever settled in Heaven as a man after God's own heart.

Tonight join me in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel as we look on the map of David's life. First we need to see where we have been, then we will see where we are headed in the study of how David fled for refuge to the Lord in every situation of life.

Now as we turn to 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 22 we are walking into David's cave. For a moment turn back with me to First Samuel 21-22 and get our bearings. But before we head into the group event of all those men who flock to David—we will catch him all alone.

David wrote more Psalms during this time--than at any other time in his life. These *cave Psalms are 4, 13, 40, 57, 70, 141-142*—lessons on how to overcome the feelings of loneliness and abandonment when we are far from help, or away from home and feel unable to go on.

I wonder have you ever felt prehistoric? And I know if you've watched television very much you've seen the conditions of what cave men look like. For them life reduced to grunts and groans. And life is an endless pursuit of nothingness at times. I like the way Edna St. Vincent Mallay put it a few years ago she said: "life must go on . . . I just can't remember why".

That's what I'm talking about--- a cave man sort of existence. A life when a vicious swirl of getting up, going to work out of the home or in the home if you're a mom--- dropping into bed exhausted at the end of the day only to find out that the entire month has gone by and falling further behind instead of ahead. That's the kind of life that I'm talking about and it's not foreign to most of us. We know what it's like; we know what it's like when it's hard.

### **Christ is Our Lifelong Refuge from Loneliness**

In I Samuel 22 where we will come to the fifth of the twelve severe times in David's life portrayed in the Psalms.

**David suffers intense loneliness as he feels abandoned while he begins to live and work with a tough crowd.** In First Samuel 22:1-2 as he moved into a cave at Adullam with an incredibly difficult group of men.

Hiding from Saul Psalms 52 to 56

The Cave starts in 57.

Some practical steps to overcome loneliness are these:

1. **Deal with sin.** Be sure that there is no unconfessed or unforsaken sin left in your life to give the Devil a place in your life. (Eph. 4:27)

2. **Share your burdens.** Clearly tell the Lord all your fears, all your struggles, all your pains—remember that He knows our frame that we are dust. (Psalm 103)
3. **Abandon all self-pity.** Constant self-sorrow is a one way ticket to loneliness. Self-pity denies we have a responsibility to deal with our emotions and thus frustrates any cure. As Jesus said, coming after Him means we deny our self (Luke 9:23).

What simple lessons can we find in cave times? **Use lonely times to grow.** One of the greatest truths we can discover is that lonely times usually accomplish great discoveries about God. David is at the depth of loneliness. He has been on the run for years and now he is hiding in a desolate cave in a crowd of malcontents, feeling very much alone. He has two choices. Stay in the cave of loneliness, descend into self-pity and sin or look up and use the time alone to grow.

Guess what David does? **Psalm 142:5-7** is the answer.

Trapped in a cave David baby sat four hundred fellow fugitives. That's his address in Psalm 142. From the cave of Adullam he looks up and discovers some great truths about God. So can we.

As we look there, why don't you take a moment and mark these for someone else who may need them someday. Or even for you if you ever feel the twinge of loneliness in your life. Look now and find:

- When alone I learn that You alone are my true REFUGE. Psalm 142:5a: **loneliness means its time to flee to your Refuge.** I will believe Your promise and turn to You as my Refuge right now.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true PORTION. Psalm 142:5b: **loneliness means its time to feed on your Portion.** I will believe Your promise to be all I need in this hard time.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true LISTENER. Psalm 142:6 'Give heed my cry': **loneliness means its time to speak to your Master.** I will believe Your promise and pour out all my troubles to You who care for me.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true DELIVERER "bring" Psalm 142:7a: **loneliness means its time to trust in your Redeemer.** I will believe Your promise and let You rescue me now.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true OBJECT OF WORSHIP Psalm 142:7b: **loneliness means its time to adore your Lord.** I will believe Your promise and worship You even when I don't feel like it.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true PROVIDER "surround" Psalm 142:7c: **loneliness means its time to rest in His Sufficient Provision.** I will believe Your promise and let You surround me now with everything I need.

So again we ask ourselves—is Christ my refuge? Is that a personal chosen reality or just a fact I've heard? God will rock your boat just to see what you will do. Loneliness is a tool to glorify God, to turn and trust and triumph, and to make some great discoveries about God.

- Are you feeling the loneliness of youth? *Jesus says I am always with you!*

- Are you feeling the loneliness of life facing family conflict and danger? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of job loss, and family separation? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of moving to a new location that is very foreign to you? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of living and working with a tough crowd? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of unemployment and unsettled home life? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of betrayal by friends? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of being wronged in a business deal? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of the complete loss of his family, friends, and finances? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of temptation and failure? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of chastisement and restoration? *Jesus says I am always with you!*
- Are you feeling the loneliness of old age? *Jesus says I am always with you!*

Psalm 71 Christ our Refuge in the Loneliness of Weakness and Sickness before Death

Psalm 116 the Christ our Refuge in the Loneliness of Death

- ***We are not lonely at death if we always remember He hears us.*** Psalm 116:1 I love the Lord, because He has heard My voice and my supplications.
- ***We are not lonely at death if we pour out our fears and needs.*** Psalm 116:2 Because He has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live.
- ***We are not lonely at death if we always remember that troubles and sorrows are neither wrong nor avoidable.*** Psalm 116:3 The pains of death surrounded me, And the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. Every great saint since the Garden of Eden (except two) have died in pain of one form or another. Jesus died most painfully. It is not wrong or sinful to have troubles and sorrows—it is normal and also a part of God’s plan.
- ***We are not lonely at death if we seek the Lord’s aid when life hurts.*** Psalm 116:4 Then I called upon the name of the Lord: “O Lord, I implore You, deliver my soul!”
- ***We are not lonely at death if we praise Him for His mercy and goodness that have followed us all through our life.*** Psalm 116:5-7 Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; Yes, our God is merciful. 6 The Lord preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me. 7 Return to your rest, O my soul, For the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.
- ***We are not lonely at death if we make it a habit to walk with God each day we live.*** Psalm 116:8-10 For You have delivered my soul from death, My eyes from tears, And my feet from falling. 9 I will walk before the Lord In the land of the living. 10 I believed, therefore I spoke, “I am greatly afflicted.” The same One who walks through life with us keeps walking and takes us through the Valley of Death’s shadows. And shadows of

death are all we get—not death. Jesus said who ever lives and believes in Him will never die.

- ***We are not lonely at death if we drink from the cup of salvation.*** Psalm 116:12-13 What shall I render to the Lord For all His benefits toward me? 13 I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the Lord. Believers never die!
- ***We are not lonely at death if we seek to obey Him during life.*** Psalm 116:14 I will pay my vows to the Lord Now in the presence of all His people. Jesus said His sheep hear His voice, follow Him—and He gives them endless life, even when their body dies!
- ***We are not lonely at death if we serve Him in life.*** Psalm 116:15-16 Precious in the sight of the Lord Is the death of His saints. 16 O Lord, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds. Serving God is what saints are going to be doing forever!
- ***We are not lonely at death if we thank Him through life.*** Psalm 116:17-19 I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, And will call upon the name of the Lord. 18 I will pay my vows to the Lord Now in the presence of all His people, 19 In the courts of the Lord's house, In the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!

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[1] All statistics from the KJV Bible.

[2] John Phillips, Exploring the Psalms, vol. 1, page 180.

[3] John Phillips, Exploring the Psalms, vol. 1, page 121.

## Cave of Troubles

### COR: Message Twenty (050918AM)

To better understand 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 22 this morning, think over the past two weeks as the stories about conditions in the New Orleans Superdome began to leak out; the descriptions boggled our senses.

Think of 20,000 bodies packed into that dark, cavernous space day after day--so many people, in such a small space, for so long--equaled a sickening stench of odor, multiplied by bathroom backups, garbage that sat around too long, water that was dirty, food that was un-refrigerated.

All that—plus heat and humidity equaled a horrible fog that was hard to even describe. That was the Superdome 2005 surrounding Hurricane Katrina.

Now, go back three thousand years ago, to a similar scene. Put 400 men in a cave all at the same time. Add time, heat, and other attending conditions that life in a cave would bring. Multiply that by the fact that these men were all under duress and also fleeing great danger—Saul was after David so they were at risk for their lives. And you have the sights and smells of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 22.1.

As we turn to 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 22 we are walking into David's cave--think of the many descriptions of the Superdome you heard or read, and put this passage into that light.

As we go into the harsh conditions of the cave of Adullam we can start to see the emotional and physical furnace of adversity and affliction that David had entered.

Then we can fully see the depths of his insights recorded in these two Psalms. Because the next two Psalms we will study in depth—Psalms 57 and 142, are written from the context of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 22. Stand/pray

- *1 Samuel 22:1-4 David therefore departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. So when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. 2 And **everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented** gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him. 3 Then David went from there to Mizpah of Moab; and he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and mother come here with you, till I know what God will do for me." 4 So he brought them before the king of Moab, and they dwelt with him all the time that David was in the stronghold.*

One truth gripped my heart the longer I studied this passage—this event is so relevant to our world today.

Often we are struck with the question in our minds--does God have any insights for me a 21<sup>st</sup> century believer faced with such challenges at work and at school? In other words, how do you make it in the classroom and workplace of America today?

1. David found the key, and wrote down how God helped him to minister to these desperate men. The group that came to live and work around him were so representative of what the culture around us is all about. They were distressed, drowned by debt, and discontented with life. Isn't that an apt description of an average American these days?
2. David also learned how to not get dragged down by those around him. As we read these verses note the emotional condition of everyone that joined up with David. They were a very needy group. And in all their need, they invaded the life of someone just coming out of the pits. It was just the right recipe for a relapse by David into despair and a return into

the pits. But the good news is—that didn't happen, and the reason why is just what we are going to learn from God's Word.

So let's go to the place where David learned to live in the midst of troubled people. David was now making the cave of Adullam his headquarters. Adullam is a cave in the region between Hebron and Philistia. It is located in the canyon that was called Rephaim, which means the Valley of Giants. After David relocated there, and set up his headquarters, and men began to drift in and come to him. Then in the next chapter we're told: "So David and his men, about six hundred . . ." (1 Samuel 23:13). So this is a growing group that came for comfort and followed David. Three types of men came: those who were in distress, those who were in debt, and those who were discontented.

### **First, Those Who Were in Distress**

"The men who came to him were, first of all, those who were in distress. Saul was in power, and David was rejected and out yonder in the caves. Saul persecuted and oppressed many of his subjects and these men who were in distress wanted deliverance and relief. They heard of David and went out to him. Many a man came into the camp of David in desperation and said, "I have been hounded like you have been hounded. I have been hated as you have been hated, and I have come to join up with you."[1]

More and more we are realizing what distresses are surrounding people in these difficult days of finances, work pressures, family pressures, marriage pressures and just plain old constant uncertainty. The school shootings, work shootings, domestic violence levels and the evening news all testify to the deep distress Americans face each day. David's cave mates were equally distressed.

So what kind of distress did these men who came to David face? Deep distress! How deep, you may wonder?

We can learn so much from the words that God inspired David to use to describe the condition of these hundreds of men surrounding him at this time.

The first word is those in **distress** (Hebrew word number 4689 *matsowq*) means squished and trapped and unable to escape. Here is an expansion on what that word means from other parts of the Bible.

- ***It is used for being at the end of your rope, feeling that death is knocking at your door, and no hope or help is possible.*** Deuteronomy 28:53-57 You shall eat the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom the Lord your God has given you, in the siege and desperate straits in which **your enemy shall distress you**. 54 The sensitive and very refined man among you will be hostile toward his brother, toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the rest of his children whom he leaves behind, 55 so that he will not give any of them the flesh of his children whom he will eat, because he has nothing left in the siege and desperate straits in which **your enemy shall distress you at all your gates**. 56 The tender and delicate woman among you, who would not venture to

set the sole of her foot on the ground because of her delicateness and sensitivity, will refuse to the husband of her bosom, and to her son and her daughter, 57 her placenta which comes out from between her feet and her children whom she bears; for she will eat them secretly for lack of everything in the siege and desperate straits in which **your enemy shall distress you at all your gates.**

- ***It is also a condition of deep sadness that can happen to even very strong believers like Ezra.*** Psalm 119:143 Trouble and **anguish** have overtaken me, Yet Your commandments are my delights.
- ***But in ordinary use it stands for an unusually hopeless condition when people do things they would never do at any other time, but are willing to do—because they are in such distress.*** Jeremiah 19:9 And I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and everyone shall eat the flesh of his friend in the siege and in **the desperation** with which their enemies and those who seek their lives shall drive them to despair.” ’

As we read these verses note the emotional condition of everyone that joined up with David. They were a very needy group that invaded David’s life right after his escape from the emotional pits. The good news is— David didn’t relapse into despair and a return into the pits. The reason why is just what we are going to learn from David’s responses.

First, we must always remember this is a spiritual battle. Who is calling the shots in this world? The god of this world, that is the Devil. Yes, the Almighty rules, but He has allowed Satan to run rampantly with evil through our world.

- *2 Corinthians 4:3-4 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.*
- *1 John 5:18 We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.*

Second, Satan is the one who causes our problems and our difficulties in the world. The only way the world around us can escape this terminal distress is to flee Satan’s rule in their lives and come to Christ’s.

Turning to Christ , or repenting, is the only way to get rid of the distress of sin today. Every year we as American consume billions of pills to tranquilize our minds and bodies. They may offer temporary relief, but they won’t get rid of your distresses. Only Jesus Christ can give us peace and relief from our distress in this day.

Finally, Satan wants us to despair, feel abandoned, and give up. David found, as we can--that his soul was kept safely in the arms of the Lord to Whom he had fled for refuge.

- *Hebrews 4:15-16 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Now let's examine the second group...

## Those Who Were in Debt

The Hebrew word for those in debt describes those who are hopelessly in debt. (Hebrew word number 5378 **nasha** means 'money lent at usury')

There was another group that came to David—those who were in debt. You see, God attempted to protect His people from debt because in that day a man in debt was actually in a terrible predicament. This is the law that God gave:

- *If you lend money to any of My people who are poor among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest. (Exodus 22:25)*

God protected the poor. But apparently Saul did not enforce the Mosaic Law. And you'll find out that even later on, during the time of Elisha, this was said:

- *A certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord. And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves." (2 Kings 4:1)*

In Saul's day, many men in debt were in danger of being sold into slavery. But before they could be taken into slavery, they ran off and joined up with David. That is the context of this passage. We have a similar problem facing us today as Americans.

We are surrounded by the pressures that our debt driven society heaps upon us. Competition, rivalry, discontentment, pride, and greed all combine to make Americans work long hours, multiple jobs—and still not have all they want. As a nation we are flooded worse than New Orleans was with water—with overwhelming debt! And the toll of the mental, physical, and emotional pressures and stresses we bear are mounting each day.

The National Public Debt that each of us as citizens of the USA collectively owe stood at \$ **7,918,009,471,434.33** yesterday.

**The US population on Saturday stood at:** 295,734,134

**That amounts to** \$26,774.08 each of us here this morning—man, woman, and child owes to our creditors mostly foreign investors. That means each of us are probably hopelessly in debt. It would take that to get America out of debt today.

So why don't you pay your share? Well, most of us can't pay; we are in debt. However, we all owe a greater debt than merely the dollars of the National Debt.

"I'm talking about a debt that sin has put us under. Our Lord taught His disciples to pray, "Forgive us our debts," because we are in debt. And it was Paul who said to the Galatians,

- *And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. (Galatians 5:3)*

You and I today are debtors to measure up to God's standard, and it is a debt we cannot pay. Paul says that we can't; according to the flesh, we would never measure up.

- *Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. (Romans 8:12)*

If you attempt to live by the flesh, you will find yourself so far in debt you will never be able to ransom yourself out. But the hymn has it right: "*He* paid the debt and set us free." When you and I were hopelessly and helplessly in debt, the Lord Jesus Christ went to the cross and paid that debt, and that is what forgiveness is today." [2]

David knew his sins were forgiven, that was his surest and dearest possession. He confesses for all the world to hear:

- *Psalm 32:1 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered.*

The joyful awareness of our unpayable debt of sin being paid in full by Christ is our strength as we go through life. We have confidence that we can face God someday because we know that the death of Jesus Christ God's Son has forgiven us, His blood has cleansed us, and His life assures us that we will safely arrive at home with Him.

A poem captures this truth, based on a gravestone with just the word forgiven inscribed upon it.

*Not far from New York, in a cemetery lone,*

*Close guarding its grave, stands a simple headstone,*

*And all the inscription is one word alone—Forgiven.*

*No sculptor's fine art hath embellish'd its form,*

*But constantly there, through the calm and the storm,*

*It beareth this word from a poor fallen worm—Forgiven.*

*It shows not the date of the silent one's birth,*

*Reveals not his frailties, nor lies of his worth,*

*But speaks out the tale from his few feet of earth—Forgiven.*

*The death is unmention'd, the name is untold,*

*Beneath lies the body, corrupted and cold,*

*Above rests his spirit, at home in the fold—Forgiven.*

*And when from the heavens the Lord shall descend,*

*This stranger shall rise and in glory ascend,*

*Well-known and befriended, to sing without end—Forgiven.*

*—Author unknown*

As far as we know, David never paid the debt of any of his mighty men, but the Lord Jesus Christ went to the cross and paid my debt.

I can say today, “I’m forgiven”?

Can you say, “I am a forgiven sinner; He has forgiven me”? That’s the only way in the world you will ever get the real debt canceled, the one that determines your eternal destiny..

## **Those Who Were Discontented**

Then the third group—those who were discontented—came to David. They were bitter of soul, discontented with life. Many in Israel who were attempting to make an honest living saw the injustice of Saul’s reign, saw the way things were going, and one day dropped their tools, left it all, and went out to join up with David. And many today who are discontented with this world know that they can’t find anything that satisfies in this world.

The Hebrew word for the discontented is actually the simple word for bitterness of the soul. Everyone who came to David had some poison of bitterness ravaging their soul. (Hebrew word number 4751 **mar** means ‘bitter’)

What a picture of the world we live around these Scriptural scenes portray. The word discontented or literally ‘bitter of soul’

- **LIKE ESAU WHO LOST IT ALL.** *Genesis 27:34-35* *When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, “Bless me—me also, O my father!” 35 But he said, “Your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing.”*

- LIKE THE POISONED WATERS OF MARAH. *Exodus 15:23* Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for **they were bitter**. Therefore the name of it was called Marah.
- LIKE THE WATER OF THE CURSE FOR INFIDELITY. *Numbers 5:18* Then the priest shall stand the woman before the Lord, uncover the woman's head, and put the offering for remembering in her hands, which is the grain offering of jealousy. And the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that brings a curse.
- LIKE THE HOPELESSNESS OF BITTER TEARS OVER CHILDLESSNESS FOR HANNAH. *1 Samuel 1:10* And she was in **bitterness of soul**, and prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish.
- LIKE THOSE ENRAGED BY FEAR. *2 Samuel 17:8* For," said Hushai, "you know your father and his men, that they are mighty men, and **they are enraged in their minds**, like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field; and your father is a man of war, and will not camp with the people.
- LIKE THOSE AWAITING EXECUTION THAT HAVE NO HOPE. *Esther 4:1* When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a **loud and bitter cry**.
- LIKE WORDS THAT ARE SPOKEN TO CAUSE INTENTIONAL WOUNDING AND PAIN. *Psalms 64:3* Who sharpen their tongue like a sword, And bend their bows to shoot their arrows—**bitter words**,

All over the world today there is a simmering discontentment. We are really heading towards some dark days as Christ's words foretold in Matthew 24. Because of the corruption and injustice of the world, a great many people are seeking a change. Are you discontented today?

These desperate men after listening to David became his mighty men who led his army to victory for 40 years! Personally, I think the greatest period in the life of David was the time when he was gathering mighty men around him[3].

If you stop to think about it—this is exactly what Christ is doing today. Jesus Christ is sending out the invitation. He is gathering a group of desperate sinners, hopelessly in debt because of sin, distressed with life, and discontented to the point of despair—and giving us life that is forgiven, and filled with His abundant joy.

Remember that all this trouble in David's life started when God took the kingdom from Saul because he refused to live by the new heart God had given him.

- God then gave the kingdom to David because David was "a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14).
- David pleased God's heart because God pleased David's heart. "I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart," he sang (Ps. 9:1).
- David's deepest desire was, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer" (Ps. 19:14).
- David prayed, "Examine me, O Lord, and try me; test my mind and my heart" (Ps. 26:2).

- And, when God told David, “Seek My face,” David’s heart replied, “Thy face, O Lord, I shall seek” (Ps. 27:8).

Where are you today? Still distressed, in debt and discontent? Or have you come to the One who died for you, offers to save you—and gives life that is real and abundant?

Are you forgiven? Do you know the security of fleeing to Christ as your personal refuge? If not do so today!

Now, where had David just arrived from when he entered the Cave at Adullam? David was fleeing from Saul.

First he went to Gath, a Philistine city, for help. When he realized that his life was also in danger there, he “acted insanely in their hands, and scribbled on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva run down into his beard” (1 Sam. 21:13). Thinking him to be mad, the Philistines let him go, and he was on his way to hide in the cave of Adullam. It was on that journey that David came to his senses and realized how foolish and unfaithful he had been to trust the Philistines for help instead of the Lord.

David was so discouraged about how he had failed the Lord that he felt abandoned—remember that as Psalm 13.

Then he felt like he was in the pits—remember that as Psalm 40 and 70.

But now as he walks to the Cave of Adullam he writes Psalm 57. It was there he wrote this Psalm as his resolve. It was there that he declared, “My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast” (v. 7). He rededicated his heart, his innermost being, single-mindedly to God. David often failed, but his heart was fixed on God.[4]

Hiding from Saul Psalms 52 to 56; Cave starts 57

Some practical steps to overcome loneliness are these:

1. ***Deal with sin.*** Be sure that there is no unconfessed or unforsaken sin left in your life to give the Devil a place in your life. (Eph. 4:27)
2. ***Share your burdens.*** Clearly tell the Lord all your fears, all your struggles, all your pains—remember that He knows our frame that we are dust. (Psalm 103)
3. ***Abandon all self-pity.*** Constant self-sorrow is a one way ticket to loneliness. Self-pity denies we have a responsibility to deal with our emotions and thus frustrates any cure. As Jesus said, coming after Him means we deny our self (Luke 9:23).

So we see that **David suffers intense loneliness as he lives and works with a tough crowd.** David wrote more Psalms in this period than at any other time in his life. These ***cave Psalms are 4, 57, 142***—how to overcome the feelings of loneliness when we are far from home and feel exiled. In First Samuel 22:1-2 as he moved into a cave at Adullam with an incredibly difficult

group of men, David wrote more Psalms than at any other time in his life. These cave Psalms are 4, 57, 142.

1. We find in 1 Sam. 24:16-22 the context for **Psalm 57**. Here we see David rising above discouragement by **applying his great discoveries about God** he learned in Psalm 142.
2. Psalm 4 appeals for those slandering him v. 2-5.
3. In **Psalm 142** We see David calling on God because of his **unfailing hope God was listening and hearing**.

### **Psalm 57—Theme: A cry for mercy**

This is the second michtam psalm, and it has an added title—*Al-taschith*, meaning “destroy not.” As we get into this psalm we will see that it has real meaning. It is inscribed “To the chief Musician, Al-taschith, Michtam of David, when he fled from Saul in the cave.”

This psalm brings us to another delightful cluster of psalms (56-60) known as the michtam psalms. What does *michtam* mean? It speaks of that which is substantial, or enduring, or fixed. *Michtam* literally means “engraven” or “permanent.” This word pictures that which is unmoveable, steadfast, stable and enduring. In Psalm 57:7 when David says, “My heart is fixed,” that is a *michtam*[5]

- *Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast [Ps. 57:1].*

“In the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge”—or as Dr. Gaebelein has it, “in the shadow of Thy wings will I find shelter.” David experienced this shelter. The nation of Israel did not, however. In Matthew 23:37 the Lord Jesus said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” Israel has not as yet come under His wings. Are you ready to come under His wings? In other words, be obedient to Him, to love Him—Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15)—and to walk in the Spirit?

Now notice these wonderful statements:

- *He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. Selah. God shall send forth his mercy and his truth [Ps. 57:3].*

This will be literally fulfilled for the faithful remnant when Christ returns in power and great glory; and they will say, “... Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation” (Isa. 25:9).

- *My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword [Ps. 57:4].*

Satan goes up and down this world like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8), and he has a lot of little lions helping him, by the way.

Remember that these michtam psalms have to do with that which is permanent and enduring, that which is substantial and lasting.

- *My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise [Ps. 57:7].*

David is saying—

- I'm not going back to trying to rescue myself like I did in Gath (Psalm 34) and miserably failed.
- I'm not going back to refusing to look at You and feeling abandoned (Psalm 13) and suffering through those long dark days.
- I'm not going back to laying in the mud of my sin and despair (Psalm 40, 70) in the pits of life.

No, my heart is fixed. I am holding on from now on to You! Then notice this beautiful expression:

- *Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early [Ps. 57:8].*

“I will wake the morning dawn” is Dr. Gaebelien’s translation. What a beautiful expression! The night of sin and suffering is over. Satan’s rule is finished, and the morning has come. The Sun of Righteousness has risen with healing in His wings. How wonderful! What assurance we find in this psalm.[6]

- *My soul is among lions; I lie among the sons of men who are set on fire, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword . . . They have prepared a net for my steps. (Psalm 57:4, 6)*

1. HIS HOPE IS IN THE LORD. (v. 1-3) In his earlier life we see David in great distress. David's problems in I Samuel 24 are the backdrop as he searches for strength in Psalm 57. He finds it in God Himself. Remember, he is in a weak time in life. This is when depression often hits.

- *Psalm 57:1-3 Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, **Until these calamities have passed by.** 2 I will cry out to God Most High, To God who performs all things for me. 3 He shall send from heaven and save me; He reproaches the one who would swallow me up. **God shall send forth His mercy and His truth.***

2. HIS STRENGTH COMES FROM THE LORD. (v. 1-11) Note that David talks about God seven times, That is a complete set. He is saying that God is enough. God and God alone is enough. He knew, and trusted, and rested in—the God who is enough!

- *Psalm 57:1-11 Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me. He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me; Selah God sends his love and his faithfulness. I am in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts -- men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. They spread a net for my feet -- I was bowed down in distress. They dug a pit in my path -- but they have fallen into it themselves. Selah My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. (NIV)*
3. HIS DISCOVERIES ARE NOW ABOUT THE LORD. (v. 1, 7, 11) For emphasis, note how David doubles three aspects of God's nature.
- *Psalm 57:1 Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. And in v.7 My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. And in v. 11 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. (NIV)*

This is what David finds: God is Gracious, God is Steadfast, God is Praise Worthy. With this truth to hold onto, he testifies that it works. And he gets his focus off his troubles. He went beyond his cave world and onto Lord!!

- *Psalm 57:11 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; Let Your glory be above all the earth.*

Finally David gets God's perspective that lifts him above the storm of Saul's murderous pursuit, above the din of hundreds of needy and desperate men—and into the peaceful calm around the Throne of God! More than any self pity or gloom, he clings to the Lord. As a New Testament writer Paul reminds us:

- *Romans 5:1-5 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

## Psalm 142

What did this tough crowd around David do to him? They depressed him! How did David, so prone to doubt, discouragement and depression—overcome this hard, troublesome time? Psalm 142 holds the key!

David wrote more Psalms during this time--than at any other time in his life. These *cave Psalms are 4, 57, 142*—lessons on how to overcome the feelings of loneliness and abandonment when we are far from help, or away from home and feel unable to go on.

I wonder have you ever felt prehistoric? And I know if you've watched television very much you've seen the conditions of what cave men look like. For them life reduced to grunts and groans. And life is an endless pursuit of nothingness at times. I like the way Edna St. Vincent Mallay put it a few years ago she said: "life must go on . . . I just can't remember why".

That's what I'm talking about--- a cave man sort of existence. A life when a vicious swirl of getting up, going to work out of the home or in the home if you're a mom--- dropping into bed exhausted at the end of the day only to find out that the entire month has gone by and falling further behind instead of ahead. That's the kind of life that I'm talking about and it's not foreign to most of us. We know what it's like; we know what it's like when it's hard.

**David suffers intense loneliness as he feels abandoned while he begins to live and work with a tough crowd.** In First Samuel 22:1-2 as he moved into a cave at Adullam with an incredibly difficult group of men.

What simple lessons can we find in cave times? *Use lonely times to grow.* One of the greatest truths we can discover is that lonely times usually accomplish great discoveries about God. David is at the depth of loneliness. He has been on the run for years and now he is hiding in a desolate cave in a crowd of malcontents, feeling very much alone. He has two choices. Stay in the cave of loneliness, descend into self-pity and sin or look up and use the time alone to grow.

Have you ever felt prehistoric? Have you ever come to the place life has been reduced to grunts and groans? As one poet expressed it, "life must go on . . . I just can't remember why".

Cave times are when life reduces to a vicious swirl. It becomes getting up, going through the day and dropping into bed exhausted only to fall further behind instead of ahead!

Trapped in a cave David baby sat four hundred fellow fugitives. That's his address in Psalm 142. From the cave of Adullam he looks up and discovers some great truths about God. So can we.

## **DAVID SINGS OF THIRSTING AND FINDING GOD WHEN I AM DISCOURAGED**

Psalm 142 is the classic confession of David when he was a caveman, alone and depressed. God satisfied him completely as he discovered great things about God. Remember, a heart that flees to God for refuge, will always be satisfied. That is the summary of the Life of David. What do we find as we examine the life of David? DAVID was always fleeing to Christ as his refuge.

And this is THE SECRET OF A LIFE THAT IS SATISFIED AT ALL TIMES. In this overview of the dark days in David's life, we see how his needs were always met by the Lord.

Cave times are usually accompanied by great distress. (v. 3-4 )

- Psalm 142:3-4 3 When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, Then You knew my path. In the way in which I walk They have secretly set a snare for me. 4 Look on my right hand and see, For there is no one who acknowledges me; Refuge has failed me; No one cares for my soul.

In the middle of great troubles there are usually some associated symptoms of depression.

- 1<sup>st</sup> david felt OVERWHELMED IN SPIRIT (v.3a): "Roof caving in!"; "Everything going wrong at once!"; "Always happens to me!"; "Not now!"; "I have some bad news"
- 2<sup>nd</sup> David thought his adversaries had HIDDEN A TRAP FOR ME (v.3b): "They're all after me"; "I've been railroaded"; "Framed"
- 3<sup>rd</sup> David feared that NO ONE REGARDS ME (v.4a): "No one called..."; "I'm a nobody"; "Poor me..."; "I'm all alone"
- 4<sup>th</sup> NO ESCAPE FOR ME (v.4b): "One-way trip to nowhere"; "You're TOO old"; "I'm sorry but the qualifications for this position..."
- Finally, NO ONE CARES FOR MY SOUL (v.4c)

Have you ever let THESE DEADENING THOUGHT CROSS YOUR MIND? They will bring gloom as fast as a storm front in a summer thunderstorm. But hold on –

Cave times usually Accomplish great discoveries about God (v. 5-7 )

- Psalm 142:5-7 5 I cried out to You, O Lord:I said, "You are my refuge, My portion in the land of the living. 6 Attend to my cry, For I am brought very low; Deliver me from my persecutors, For they are stronger than I. 7 Bring my soul out of prison, That I may praise Your name; The righteous shall surround me, For You shall deal bountifully with me."

Why don't you take a moment and mark these for someone else who may need them someday. Or even for you if you hit the dust. How's your world? Caving in? Look now and find:

David is here Pursuing the only source of hope again. This was illustrated in the life of David. I Samuel 22:1-2 is the setting for Psalm 142 and the Cave of Adullam. What a great help that Psalm is when we are hurting.

Guess what David does? **Psalm 142:5-7** is the answer.

Trapped in a cave David baby sat four hundred fellow fugitives. That's his address in Psalm 142. From the cave of Adullam he looks up and discovers some great truths about God. So can we.

- OVERWHELMED IN SPIRIT (v.3)

"Roof caving in!"

"Everything going wrong at once!"

"Always happens to me!"

"Not now!"

"I have some bad news"

- HIDDEN A TRAP FOR ME

"They're all after me"

"I've been railroaded"

"Framed"

- NO ONE REGARDS ME (v.4)

"No one called..."

"I'm a nobody"

"Poor me..."

"I'm all alone"

- NO ESCAPE FOR ME

"One-way trip to nowhere"

"You're TOO old"

"I'm sorry but the qualifications for this position..."

YES, NO ONE CARES FOR MY SOUL

1. In Psalm 142 we see him calling on God because of an unmistakable hope God was hearing.

- David stood for God because he was concerned for God's name.

- David depended on God because he trusted God 's caring.

- David magnified God because he acknowledged God watching.

- David called on God because he hoped God was hearing.

Now to the conclusion as the caveman confesses the end result of acting upon these great discoveries about God:

1. v.1a – God is Gracious

Look to Exodus 33:12 – 34:6

God is gracious to even save us

So sinful...

2. v.1b – God is Refuge

He said it is Psalm 142:5

He says it here...

Look at Psalm 91

God is our shelter, protection, covering and shade

The cross is our safe harbor Hebrews 6:19 – anchored!

3. v.2 – God accomplishes

Interlude – enemy without because enemy within v. 4/6

Solution – v.5 focus on God

v.6 God saves

4. v.7a – God Establishes

See Psalm 40 5x He....

Inclined to me,

heard my cry,

brought me up

Set my feet

Put a new song

5. v.7b – God makes us praise through sorrow
6. v.8-9 – God makes us thankful
7. v.9b – God opens an audience to us...
8. v. 10 – God is loyal

Lamentations 3 - mercies fail not

9. v.11 – God uses adoring His name to pull us out of the cave to Him!

As we look there, why don't you take a moment and mark these for someone else who may need them someday. Or even for you if you ever feel the twinge of loneliness in your life. Look now and find:

- When alone I learn that You alone are my true REFUGE. Psalm 142:5a: ***loneliness means its time to flee to the Lord my Refuge***. I will believe Your promise and turn to You as my Refuge right now.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true PORTION. Psalm 142:5b: ***loneliness means its time to feed on the Lord my Portion***. I will believe Your promise to be all I need in this hard time.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true LISTENER. Psalm 142:6 'Give heed my cry': ***loneliness means its time to speak to the Lord my Master***. I will believe Your promise and pour out all my troubles to You who care for me.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true DELIVERER "bring" Psalm 142:7a: ***loneliness means its time to trust in the Lord my Redeemer***. I will believe Your promise and let You rescue me now.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true OBJECT OF WORSHIP Psalm 142:7b: ***loneliness means its time to offer worship to the Lord my Lord***. I will believe Your promise and worship You even when I don't feel like it.
- When alone I learn that You alone are my true PROVIDER "surround" Psalm 142:7c: ***loneliness means its time to rest in the Lord my Provider***. I will believe Your promise and let You surround me now with everything I need.

Ever felt prehistoric? A life reduced to grunts and groans? As one poet expressed it, "life must go on . . . I just can't remember why". A vicious swirl of getting up, going through the day and dropping into bed exhausted only to fall further behind instead of ahead? Trapped in a cave David baby-sat four hundred fellow fugitives. That's his address in Psalm 142. From the cave of Adullam he looks up and discovers some great truths about God. So can we.

Cave times often slide in right after our victories as David discovered. As "the hero" David toppled the #1 Villain of the hour (Goliath) and lived to tell about it (I Samuel 17). As "Mr. Brave" David escaped an assassination attempt by Saul (I Samuel 19). As "Mr. Clever" David acted his way out of the presence of the dreadful commander of the Philistines (I Samuel 21). In

our text we meet David running for his life, caring for his family and hosting all these malcontents.

Cave life yields great discoveries about God. David sings them in Psalm 142. Listen to the confessions of this caveman: "Lord of Refuge, You are my Portion" (v.5), "O Listening One, hear my cry and Rescue me (v.6). My God who Provides the righteous to gather about me, You are Sufficient" (v. 7). How's your world? Caving in? Why not look out of your need and find the courage needed in the One David found sufficient!

Deterring Immorality by Counting Its Cost

The exorbitant Price of Sexual Sin

by Randy Alcorn

In 1850 Nathaniel Hawthorne published *The Scarlet Letter*, a powerful novel centered around the adulterous relationship of Hester Prynne and the highly respected minister, Reverend Mr. Arthur Dimmesdale. The fallen pastor, remorseful but not ready to face the consequences, asks the question, "What can a ruined soul, like mine, effect towards the redemption of other souls?-or a polluted soul, towards their purification?" He describes the misery of standing in his pulpit and seeing the admiration of his people, and having to "then look inward, and discern the black reality of what they idolize." Finally he says, "I have laughed, in bitterness and agony of heart, at the contrast between what I seem and what I am! And Satan laughs at it!"

Ruined, polluted, black reality, bitterness, agony. And perhaps, worst of all, Satan's laugh. These are just some of the consequences of sexual immorality in the life of one known as a follower of God.

I met with a man who had been a leader in a Christian organization until he committed immorality. I asked him, "What could have been done to prevent this?" He paused only for a moment, then said with haunting pain and precision, "If only I had really known, really thought through and weighed what it would cost me and my family and my Lord, I honestly believe I would never have done it."

Some years ago my friend Alan Hlavka and I both developed lists of all the specific consequences we could think of that would result from our immorality as pastors. The lists were devastating, and to us they spoke more powerfully than any sermon or article on the subject.

Periodically, especially when travelling or when in a time of temptation or weakness, we read through this list. In a personal and tangible way it brings home God's inviolate law of choice and consequence. It cuts through the fog of rationalization and fills our hearts with the healthy, motivating fear of God. We find that when we begin to think unclearly, reviewing this list yanks us back to the reality of the law of the harvest and the need both to fear God *and* the consequences of sin.

An edited version of our combined lists follows. I've included the actual names of my wife and daughters to emphasize the personal nature of this exercise. Where it involves my own lists of specific people's names, I've simply stated "list names" so the reader can insert the appropriate ones in his own life.

Some of these consequences would be unique to me, just as some of yours would be unique to you. I recommend that you use this as the basis for your own list, then include those other consequences that would be uniquely yours. The idea, of course, is not to focus on sin, but on the *consequences* of sin, thereby encouraging us to refocus on the Lord and take steps of wisdom and purity that can keep us from falling.

(While God can forgive and bring beauty out of ashes, that's a message to those who have already sinned...not to those who are contemplating sin! On the "front side" of sin we must not give assurances of forgiveness and restoration. We must put the focus where Scripture does-on the love of God *and* the fear of God, both of which should act in concert to motivate us to holy obedience.)

#### Personalized List of Anticipated Consequences of Immorality

- Grieving my Lord; displeasing the One whose opinion most matters.
- Dragging into the mud Christ's sacred reputation.
- Loss of reward and commendation from God.
- Having to one day look Jesus in the face at the judgment seat and give an account of why I did it.
- Forcing God to discipline me in various ways.
- Following in the footsteps of men I know of whose immorality forfeited their ministry and caused me to shudder. List of these names:
- Suffering of innocent people around me who would get hit by my shrapnel (a la Achan).
- Untold hurt to Nanci, my best friend and loyal wife.
- Loss of Nanci's respect and trust.
- Hurt to and loss of credibility with my beloved daughters, Karina and Angela. ("Why listen to a man who betrayed Mom and us?")
- If my blindness should continue or my family be unable to forgive, I could lose my wife and my children forever.
- Shame to my family. ("Why isn't Daddy a pastor anymore?"; the cruel comments of others who would invariably find out.)
- Shame to my church family.
- Shame and hurt to my fellow pastors and elders. List of names:
- Shame and hurt to my friends, and especially those I've led to Christ and disciplined. List of names:
- Guilt awfully hard to shake-even though God would forgive me, would I forgive myself?
- Plaguing memories and flashbacks that could taint future intimacy with my wife.
- Disqualifying myself after having preached to others.
- Surrender of the things I am called to and love to do-teach and preach and write and minister to others. Forfeiting forever certain opportunities to serve God. Years of training and experience in ministry wasted for a long period of time, maybe permanently.

- Being haunted by my sin as I look in the eyes of others, and having it all dredged up again wherever I go and whatever I do.
- Undermining the hard work and prayers of others by saying to our community "this is a hypocrite-who can take seriously anything he and his church have said and done?"
- Laughter, rejoicing and blasphemous smugness by those who disrespect God and the church (2 Samuel 12:14).
- Bringing great pleasure to Satan, the Enemy of God.
- Heaping judgment and endless problems on the person I would have committed adultery with.
- Possible diseases: gonorrhea, syphilis, chlamydia, herpes, and AIDS (pain, constant reminder to me and my wife, possible infection of Nanci, or in the case of AIDS, even causing her death, as well as mine.)
- Possible pregnancy, with its personal and financial implications, including a lifelong reminder of sin to me and my family.
- Loss of self-respect, discrediting my own name, and invoking shame and lifelong embarrassment upon myself.

*These are only some of the consequences. **If only we would rehearse in advance the ugly and overwhelming consequences of immorality, we would be far more prone to avoid it. May we live each day in the love and fear of God.***

Suppose I said, "There's a great-looking girl down the street. Let's go look through her window and watch her undress, then pose for us naked, from the waist up. Then this girl and her boyfriend will get in a car and have sex – let's listen and watch the windows steam up!"

You'd be shocked. You'd think, What a pervert!

But suppose instead I said, "Hey, come on over. Let's watch **Titanic**."

Christians recommend this movie, church youth groups view it together, and many have shown it in their homes. Yet the movie contains precisely the scenes I described.

So, as our young men lust after bare breasts on the screen, our young women are trained in how to get a man's attention.

How does something shocking and shameful somehow become acceptable because we watch it through a television instead of a window?

In terms of the lasting effects on our minds and morals, what's the difference?

Yet many think, **Titanic? Wonderful! It wasn't even rated R!**

Every day Christians across the country, including many church leaders, watch people undress through the window of television. We peek on people committing fornication and adultery, which our God calls an abomination.

We've become voyeurs, Peeping Toms, entertained by sin.

### **Normalizing evil**

The enemy's strategy is to normalize evil. Consider young people struggling with homosexual temptation. How does it affect them when they watch popular television dramas where homosexual partners live together in apparent normality?

Parents who wouldn't dream of letting a dirty-minded adult baby-sit their children do it every time they let their kids surf the channels. Not only we, but our children become desensitized to immorality. Why are we surprised when our son gets a girl pregnant if we've allowed him to watch hundreds of immoral acts and hear thousands of jokes with sexual innuendos?

*But it's just one little sex scene.*

Suppose I offered you a cookie, saying, "A few mouse droppings fell in the batter, but for the most part it's a great cookie –you won't even notice."

"To fear the LORD is to hate evil" (Proverbs 8:13). When we're being entertained by evil, how can we hate it? How can we be pure when we amuse ourselves with impurity?

God warns us not to talk about sex inappropriately:

"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity... because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place" (Ephesians 5:3-4).

How do our favorite dramas and sitcoms stand up to these verses? How about **Seinfeld** and other nightly reruns? Do they contain "even a hint of sexual immorality" or "coarse joking"? If we can listen to late night comedians' monologues riddled with immoral references, are we really fearing God and hating evil?

### **Jesus, the radical**

Consider Christ's words:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell" (Matthew 5:27-30).

Why does Jesus paint this shocking picture? I believe He wants us to take radical steps, to do whatever is necessary to deal with sexual temptation.

Now, the hand and eye are not the causes of sin. A blind man can still lust and a man without a hand can still steal. But the eye is a means of access for both godly and ungodly input. And the hand is a means of performing righteous or sinful acts. We must therefore govern what the eye looks at and the hand does.

If we take Jesus seriously, we need to think far more radically about sexual purity.

### **Doing what it takes**

The battle is too intense, and the stakes are too high to approach purity casually or gradually. So ... if you can't keep your eyes away from those explicit images, don't ever go to a video rental store. *Come on. Everybody goes into those stores.*

No. If it causes you to sin, you shouldn't. Period.

Do your thoughts trip you up when you're with certain persons? Stop hanging out with them. Does a certain kind of music charge you up erotically? Stop listening to it. Do you make phone calls you shouldn't? Block 900 phone sex numbers so you can't call them from your home.

If these things seem like crutches, fine. Use whatever crutches you need to help you walk.

Some men fall into mental adultery through lingerie ads, billboards, women joggers in tight pants, women with low cut blouses or short skirts, cheerleaders or dancers, movies, TV shows, and commercials of the beer-and-bikini variety. Some men's weakness is the Sunday newspaper's ad inserts or nearly any magazine.

So, ***stop looking***. And then ***stop putting yourself in the position to look!***

If you have to get rid of your TV to guard your purity, do it.

If it means you can't go to games because of how dancers or cheerleaders dress and perform, so be it. If it means you have to lower your head and close your eyes, so be it. If you're embarrassed to do that, stay home.

Tell your wife about your struggles. Or if you're single, tell a godly friend. If you need to drop the newspaper because of those ads, fine. If you need your wife to go through it first and pull out the offending inserts, ask her.

Romans 13:14 instructs us to "make no provision for the flesh" (NASB). It's a sin to deliberately put ourselves in a position where we'll likely commit sin. Whether it's the lingerie department, the swimming pool, or the workout room at an athletic club, if it trips you up, stay away from it.

Proverbs describes the loose woman meeting up with the foolish man after dark (see Proverbs 7:8-9). We must stay away from people, places, and contexts that make sin more likely.

If it's certain bookstores or hangouts, ***stay away from them***. If cable or satellite TV or network TV, old friends from high school, the Internet, or computers are your problem, ***get rid of them***.

Just say no to whatever is pulling you away from Jesus. Remember, if you want a different outcome, you must make different choices.

If you can't be around women wearing swimsuits without looking and lusting, then don't go on

vacation where women wear swimsuits. If that means not going water-skiing or to a favorite resort, fine. If it means being unable to go on a church-sponsored retreat, don't go.

Sound drastic? Compare it to gouging out an eye or cutting off a hand!

**“But...”**

*But there are hardly any decent TV shows anymore.* Then stop watching TV. Read books. Have conversations.

*But all the newer novels have sex scenes.* Then read the old novels. Read fiction from Christian publishers.

*But I've subscribed to Sports Illustrated for thirty years, back before they had the swimsuit issue.* They have it now. So drop your subscription. And tell them why.

*But it's almost impossible to rent a movie without sex and offensive language.* There are Christian movie review sites that can help you make good selections for family viewing. There are also services which offer edited movies, television adaptors which edit profanity, and DVD software that cuts offensive scenes from movies.

But suppose there were no decent movies – what then? I enjoy good movies, but the Bible never commands us, “Watch movies.” It does command us, “Guard your heart.”

It's a battle – battles get bloody. Do whatever it takes to walk in purity!

A friend wrote a daily contract that asks these questions: “Are you willing to do whatever's necessary to protect your sexual sobriety? Ask God for help? Call on others? Go to meetings? Read literature? Set boundaries and not cross them? Be brutally honest?”

**Too radical?**

*But you're talking about withdrawing from the culture. What you're saying is too radical.*

No, what I'm saying is nothing. Jesus said, “If it would keep you from sexual temptation, you'd be better off poking out your eye and cutting off your hand.” Now that's radical.

Many claim they're serious about purity, but then they say, “No way; I'm not going to give up cable TV,” or “I'm not going to have my wife hold the computer password.”

Followers of Jesus have endured torture and given their lives in obedience to Him. And we're whining about giving up cable?

When Jesus called us to take up our crosses and follow Him (see Matthew 10:38), didn't that imply sacrifices greater than forgoing Internet access?

How sold out are you to the battle for purity? How desperate are you to have victory over sin?

How radical are you willing to get for your Lord? How much do you want the joy and peace that can be found only in Him? Purity comes only to those who truly want it.

### **Controlling the Internet**

- Use family-friendly Internet service providers. Install a pornography-filtering program on your computer, realizing it can't screen out everything. Ask someone else to hold the password. Ask someone to regularly check your Internet usage history.
- Use family-friendly Internet service providers. Install a pornography-filtering program on your computer, realizing it can't screen out everything. Ask someone else to hold the password. Ask someone to regularly check your Internet usage history.
- Move computers to high-traffic areas. Unless you have a proven history of going on-line safely, don't log on to the Internet if you're alone. Be sure the monitor always faces an open door, where others can see what you're looking at (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- If you're still losing the battle, disconnect the Internet — or get rid of the computer.

### **Taking charge of the TV**

- Consult a schedule to choose appropriate programs. Channel-surfing invites temptation.
- Keep your television unplugged, store it in a closet, or put it in the garage to prevent mindless flip-on.
- Use the “off” switch freely. Use the remote quickly when temptation comes. Have a safe channel ready to turn to.
- Don't allow young children to choose their own programs. As they get older they can choose, but parents have veto power. Avoid multiple TVs that split the family and leave children unsupervised. Don't use television as a babysitter.
- Spend an hour reading Scripture, a Christian book, or participating in a ministry for each hour you watch TV. Even when television isn't bad, it often keeps us from what's better.
- Drop cable, HBO, your satellite dish, or your TV if it is promoting ungodliness in your home. (This isn't legalism — it's discipleship.)
- Periodically “fast” from television for a week or a month. Watch what happens; see if you like what you can do with all that time (including feeding your passion for Christ).

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[1] McGee, J. Vernon, *David: A Man After God's Own Heart*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc.) 2001, c2000.

[2] McGee, J. Vernon, *David: A Man After God's Own Heart*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc.) 2001, c2000.

[3] McGee, J. Vernon, *David: A Man After God's Own Heart*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc.) 2001, c2000.

[4] MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

[5] McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

[6] McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

# **Graduating from the Cave of Troubles**

## **COR: Message Twenty-One (051002AM)**

As we open to I Samuel 22 this morning, may I remind you of David's situation. God was training David to be King of His people Israel. David had many lessons to learn in order to accomplish all that the Lord had planned for him to do.

But--David had a problem. God wanted to shape him into a better servant but in the critical moment David waffled, and failed the test. Isn't that a situation we have also experienced?

But the lessons that needed to be learned could only come in the school of affliction. Specifically, God had David enrolled in the cave of troubles. This cave in I Samuel 22 was where David would face his personal problems and people with problems that just wouldn't go away.

Now, where had David just arrived from when he entered the Cave at Adullam? David was fleeing from Saul. Remember that all this trouble in David's life started when God took the kingdom from Saul because he refused to live by the new heart God had given him.

God then gave the kingdom to David because David was "a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14). David pleased God's heart because God pleased David's heart. "I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart," he sang (Ps. 9:1).

David's deepest desire was, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer" (Ps. 19:14).

David prayed, "Examine me, O Lord, and try me; test my mind and my heart" (Ps. 26:2).

And, when God told David, "Seek My face," David's heart replied, "Thy face, O Lord, I shall seek" (Ps. 27:8).

So God starts David's technical education, preparing him to be the kind of servant God could use greatly. This involved some painful troublesome times guided by the Hand of the Lord. First he went to Gath, a Philistine city, for help. When he realized that his life was also in danger there, he "acted insanely in their hands, and scribbled on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva run down into his beard" (1 Sam. 21:13). Thinking him to be mad, the Philistines let him go, and he was on his way to hide in the cave of Adullam. It was on that journey that David came to his senses and realized how foolish and unfaithful he had been to trust the Philistines for help instead of the Lord.

David had failed the test at Gath, he had tried to take care of the situation by himself and without God. David was so discouraged about how he had failed the Lord that he felt abandoned—remember that as Psalm 13.

Then he felt like he was in the pits—remember that as Psalm 40 and 70.

But now as he walks to the Cave of Adullam he makes a resolve to start over with the Lord, to experience a new beginning.

The cave of troubles was the only place David could learn what God wanted him to know. After David learned how to serve the Lord even while living in a cave of troubles, he recorded his testimony for us in Psalm 57.

It was there that he declared, “My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast” (Psalm 57:7). He rededicated his heart, his innermost being, single-mindedly to God. David often failed, but his heart was fixed on God.[1]

Now, go back three thousand years ago, into the harsh conditions of the cave of Adullam we can start to see the emotional and physical furnace of adversity and affliction that David had entered.

Then we can fully see the depths of his insights recorded in these two Psalms. Because the next two Psalms we will study in depth—Psalms 57 and 142, are written from the context of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 22. Stand/pray

- *1 Samuel 22:1-4 David therefore departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. So when his brothers and all his father’s house heard it, they went down there to him. 2 And **everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented** gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him. 3 Then David went from there to Mizpah of Moab; and he said to the king of Moab, “Please let my father and mother come here with you, till I know what God will do for me.” 4 So he brought them before the king of Moab, and they dwelt with him all the time that David was in the stronghold.*

One truth gripped my heart the longer I studied this passage—this event is so relevant to our world today.

Often we are struck with the question in our minds--does God have any insights for me a 21<sup>st</sup> century believer faced with such challenges at work and at school? In other words, how do you make it in the classroom and workplace of America today?

1. **MINISTRY KEY:** David found and wrote down how God helped him to minister to these desperate men. The group that came to live and work around him were so representative of what the culture around us is all about. They were distressed, drowned by debt, and discontented with life. Isn’t that an apt description of an average American these days? And as we find in Psalm 57, David was able to minister to them.
2. **PERSONAL KEY:** David also learned how to not get his life and emotions dragged down by those around him. As we read these verses note the emotional condition of everyone that joined up with David. They were a very needy group. And in all their need, they invaded the life of someone just coming out of the pits. It was just the right recipe for a relapse by David into despair and a return into the pits. But the good news is—that didn’t happen, and the reason why is just what we are going to learn from God’s Word.

So let's go to the place where David learned to live in the midst of troubled people. Three types of men came: those who were in distress, those who were in debt, and those who were discontented.

### Those Who Were in Distress

So what kind of distress did these men who came to David face? Deep distress! How deep, you may wonder? We can learn so much from the words that God inspired David to use to describe the condition of these hundreds of men surrounding him at this time.

The first word is those in **distress** (Hebrew word number 4689 *matsowq*) means squished and trapped and unable to escape. Here is an expansion on what that word means from other parts of the Bible.

- **Distressed in the Old Testament** *is used for being at the end of your rope, feeling that death is knocking at your door, and no hope or help is possible.* Deuteronomy 28:53-57
- **Distressed in the Old Testament** *is also a condition of deep sadness that can happen to even very strong believers like Ezra.* Psalm 119:143 Trouble and **anguish** have overtaken me, Yet Your commandments are my delights.
- **Distressed in the Old Testament, in ordinary use it stands for an unusually hopeless condition when people do things they would never do at any other time, but are willing to do—because they are in such distress.** Jeremiah 19:9

Satan wants us to despair, feel abandoned, and give up. David found, as we can--that his soul was kept safely in the arms of the Lord to Whom he had fled for refuge.

- *Hebrews 4:15-16 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

### Those Who Were in Debt

The Hebrew word for those in debt describes those who are hopelessly in debt. (Hebrew word number 5378 **nasha** means 'money lent at usury')

In Saul's day, many men in debt were in danger of being sold into slavery. But before they could be taken into slavery, they ran off and joined up with David. That is the context of this passage. We have a similar problem facing us today as Americans.

We are surrounded by the pressures that our debt driven society heaps upon us. Competition, rivalry, discontentment, pride, and greed all combine to make Americans work long hours, multiple jobs—and still not have all they want. As a nation we are flooded worse than New Orleans was with water—with overwhelming debt! And the toll of the mental, physical, and emotional pressures and stresses we bear are mounting each day.

The National Public Debt that each of us as citizens of the USA collectively owe stood at \$ **7,918,009,471,434.33** yesterday.

**The US population on Saturday stood at:** 295,734,134

**That amounts to** \$26,774.08 each of us here this morning—man, woman, and child owes to our creditors mostly foreign investors. That means each of us are probably hopelessly in debt—when you combine personal and public debt!

So why don't you pay your share? Well, most of us can't pay; we are in debt. However, we all owe a greater debt that merely the dollars of the National Debt.

"I'm talking about a debt that sin has put us under. Our Lord taught His disciples to pray, "Forgive us our debts," because we are in debt. When you and I were hopelessly and helplessly in debt, the Lord Jesus Christ went to the cross and paid that debt, and that is what forgiveness is today." [2]

David knew his sins were forgiven, that was his surest and dearest possession. He confesses for all the world to hear:

- *Psalm 32:1 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered.*

The joyful awareness of our unpayable debt of sin being paid in full by Christ is our strength as we go through life. We have confidence that we can face God someday because we know that the death of Jesus Christ God's Son has forgiven us, His blood has cleansed us, and His life assures us that we will safely arrive at home with Him.

Remember the gravestone with just the word forgiven inscribed upon it? David could accept these indebted men, he could encourage them—but as far as we know, David never paid the debt of any of his mighty men, but the Lord Jesus Christ went to the cross and paid my debt. I can say today, "I'm forgiven"!

Can you say, "I am a forgiven sinner; He has forgiven me"? That's the only way in the world you will ever get the real debt canceled, the one that determines your eternal destiny..

## **Those Who Were Discontented**

Then the third group—those who were discontented—came to David. They were bitter of soul, discontented with life. Many in Israel who were attempting to make an honest living saw the injustice of Saul's reign, saw the way things were going, and one day dropped their tools, left it all, and went out to join up with David. So many millions of people across our land and around the world wake up each day to a world they want changed. They feel hopelessly able to have and do what they long for. They spend their days longing to be somewhere else, do something else, or have something else. They live lives of growing discontent and desperation as time passes them by.

The Hebrew word for the discontented is actually the word for bitterness of the soul. Everyone who came to David had some poison of bitterness ravaging their soul. (Hebrew word number 4751 *mar* means 'bitter')

What a picture of the world we live around these Scriptural scenes portray. The word discontented or literally 'bitter of soul'

- LIKE ESAU WHO LOST IT ALL AND WAS BITTERLY DISCONTENTED WITH LIFE. *Genesis 27:34-35* When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an **exceedingly great and bitter cry**, and said to his father, "Bless me—me also, O my father!" 35 But he said, "Your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing."
- LIKE THE POISONED WATERS OF MARAH THAT BITTERLY DISAPPOINTED THE THIRSTY ISRAELITES. *Exodus 15:23* Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for **they were bitter**. Therefore the name of it was called Marah.
- LIKE THE WATER OF THE CURSE FOR INFIDELITY THAT SPRANG FROM THE BITTERLY SUSPICIOUS AND JEALOUS HUSBAND OF AN UNFAITHFUL WIFE. *Numbers 5:18* Then the priest shall stand the woman before the Lord, uncover the woman's head, and put the offering for remembering in her hands, which is the grain offering of jealousy. And the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that brings a curse.
- LIKE THE HOPELESSNESS OF BITTER TEARS OVER CHILDLESSNESS FOR HANNAH. *1 Samuel 1:10* And she was in **bitterness of soul**, and prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish.
- LIKE THOSE ENRAGED BY FEAR. *2 Samuel 17:8* For," said Hushai, "you know your father and his men, that they are mighty men, and **they are enraged in their minds**, like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field; and your father is a man of war, and will not camp with the people.
- LIKE THOSE AWAITING EXECUTION THAT HAVE NO HOPE. *Esther 4:1* When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a **loud and bitter cry**.
- LIKE WORDS THAT ARE SPOKEN TO CAUSE INTENTIONAL WOUNDING AND PAIN. *Psalms 64:3* Who sharpen their tongue like a sword, And bend their bows to shoot their arrows—**bitter words**,

All over the world today there are bitterly discontented people—sick of life, hopeless, and injuring those around them. We are really heading towards some dark days as Christ's words foretold in Matthew 24. Because of the corruption and injustice of the world, a great many people are seeking a change. Are you discontented today?

These desperate men after listening to David became his mighty men who led his army to victory for 40 years! Personally, I think the greatest period in the life of David was the time when he was gathering mighty men around him[3].

If you stop to think about it—this is exactly what Christ is doing today. Jesus Christ is sending out the invitation. He is gathering a group of desperate sinners, hopelessly in debt because of sin, distressed with life, and discontented to the point of despair—and giving us life that is forgiven, and filled with His abundant joy.

Where are you today? Still distressed, in debt and discontent? Or have you come to the One who died for you, offers to save you—and gives life that is real and abundant?

Are you forgiven? Do you know the security of fleeing to Christ as your personal refuge? If not do so today!

God forgave my sins in Jesus Name...sing that with me as we prepare to commune with our Savior.

One of the times God had me enrolled me in a cave of troubles started thirty years ago as I entered Bible college. I volunteered to drive an evangelistic team on weekends that traveled out from the school. My car had eight seats and that was the draw—but it was a 1973 Plymouth station wagon with over a hundred and sixty thousand miles on it.

I was in training for the ministry and was always asking the Lord to teach me what I needed to know to serve Him better. Little did I know way back then, that He would send the lessons through a series of troubles. For the entire year my car would break down in the most troublesome ways, and with the most wonderful lessons in God's care.

One weekend we were headed to Goldsboro, NC just five hours from school. We left in plenty of time to start the meetings by 7 PM. A half an hour outside Goldsboro the car died. All the lights went black as the engine stopped, and we rolled to the edge of the interstate. Within five minutes a state trooper pulled up, assessed the situation and told us we had to get the car towed off the highway.

It was a bad section with not enough shoulder room for all the semis that filled that stretch of highway. Because it was a highway the tow truck had to be a double hook to secure the car for highway towing. All that to say it cost much more than we had or could spend on towing as we piled into the tow truck.

The state trooper gave the rest of the team a ride to the service station. He had stayed long enough to watch all eight of us on our knees around the back of the wagon. The team had knelt in prayer with me before being picked up for a belated arrival for the services that night.

Just before the trooper left he came up to me and said, "I just wanted to help a little" and handed me \$10 out his window as he drove away.

So an hour after the car died I was all alone in a service station somewhere in the dark NC hills. The mechanic soon found me and reported it was an electrical problem and it would be expensive. The towing was already \$75 which we didn't have. Usually the church paid for the gas when we arrived and then gave us enough to get home on after the meetings.

As I sat in the smoky waiting room reading my Bible and praying while they worked on the car, I thought what was the Lord doing? We were committed, focused, and serving. We were only doing this trip to help share the gospel with lost and needy ones in a far off place.

Why would this have to happen to us? I knew that I could borrow the money, then pay it back over the weeks ahead, but that would curtail my ability to transport the team. None of it made sense at that moment.

After two more hours I got a call from the team that the meetings went well and they would send someone to get me if needed. Just then the service station owner came up. He told me that he had also seen us pray, and had watched the NC State Trooper hand me \$10 out the window. So he said that he wanted to help too.

He handed me the bills and said the tow bill, the repair bill and even some gas were his way of helping. Everything was paid for and I could go!

What lesson did the Lord want me to learn? He wanted me to know that when troubles come unexpectedly, He has some powerful lessons for me to learn--lessons that I could only learn from going through difficult situations. It was after this year of troubles that I was prepared for the next area of ministry the Lord had planned for me--going behind the Iron Curtain and having to trust the Lord at all times for everything!

This psalm brings us to another delightful cluster of psalms (56-60) known as the *michtam* psalms. What does *michtam* mean? It speaks of that which is substantial, or enduring, or fixed. *Michtam* literally means “engraved” or “permanent.” This word pictures that which is unmoveable, steadfast, stable and enduring. In Psalm 57:7 when David says, “My heart is fixed,” that is a *michtam*[4] *Fixed is the Hebrew word (3559) kuwn* prepare 85, establish 58, ready 17.

- *Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had **prepared** his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.*
- *Psalm 37:23 The steps of a good man are **ordered** by the Lord, And He delights in his way.*
- *Psalm 40:2 He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And **established** my steps.*
- *Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a **steadfast** spirit within me.*
- *Psalm 112:7 He will not be afraid of evil tidings; His heart is **steadfast**, trusting in the Lord.*
- *Psalm 119:133 **Direct** my steps by Your word, And let no iniquity have dominion over me.*
- *Proverbs 16:3 Commit your works to the Lord, And your thoughts will be **established**.*
- *Proverbs 16:9 A man’s heart plans his way, But the Lord **directs** his steps.*

Remember that these *michtam* psalms have to do with that which is permanent and enduring, that which is substantial and lasting.

- *My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise [Ps. 57:7].*

David is saying—

- I'm not going back to trying to rescue myself like I did in Gath (Psalm 34) and miserably failed.
- I'm not going back to refusing to look at You and feeling abandoned (Psalm 13) and suffering through those long dark days.
- I'm not going back to laying in the mud of my sin and despair (Psalm 40, 70) in the pits of life.

No, my heart is fixed. I am holding on from now on to You!

1. **When Troubles come—David pulls over and calls for help from the Lord. HIS HOPE IS IN THE LORD.** (v. 1-3) In his earlier life we see David in great distress. David's problems in I Samuel 24 are the backdrop as he searches for strength in Psalm 57. He finds it in God Himself. Remember, he is in a weak time in life. This is when depression often hits.
  - *Psalm 57:1-3 Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, **Until these calamities have passed by.** 2 I will cry out to God Most High, To God who performs all things for me. 3 He shall send from heaven and save me; He reproaches the one who would swallow me up. **God shall send forth His mercy and His truth.***
2. **Then David waits for the Tow Truck. HIS STRENGTH COMES FROM THE LORD.** (v. 1-11) Note that David talks about God seven times, That is a complete set. He is saying that God is enough. God and God alone is enough. He knew, and trusted, and rested in—the God who is enough!
  - *Psalm 57:1-11 Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me. He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me; Selah God sends his love and his faithfulness. I am in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts -- men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. They spread a net for my feet -- I was bowed down in distress. They dug a pit in my path -- but they have fallen into it themselves. Selah My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. (NIV)*
3. **Sitting in the waiting room he grows. HIS DISCOVERIES ARE NOW ABOUT THE LORD.** (v. 1, 5, 7, 11) For emphasis, note how David doubles three aspects of God's

nature. This is what David finds: God is Gracious, God is Steadfast, God is Praise Worthy. With this truth to hold onto, he testifies that it works. And he gets his focus off his troubles. He went beyond his cave world and onto Lord!!

- *Psalm 57:1 Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. Psalm 57:5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. And in v.7 My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. And in v. 11 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. (NIV)*
4. **Finally David drives off from the situation deeply blessed for the hard time. HIS FOCUS IS ON THE LORD.** (v. 5, 11) Finally David gets God’s perspective that lifts him above the storm of Saul’s murderous pursuit, above the din of hundreds of needy and desperate men—and into the peaceful calm around the Throne of God! More than any self pity or gloom, he clings to the Lord. As a New Testament writer Paul reminds us:
- *Romans 5:1-5 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

### Some practical steps to overcome loneliness are these:

1. **Deal with sin.** Be sure that there is no unconfessed or unforsaken sin left in your life to give the Devil a place in your life. (Eph. 4:27)
2. **Share your burdens.** Clearly tell the Lord all your fears, all your struggles, all your pains—remember that He knows our frame that we are dust. (Psalm 103)
3. **Abandon all self-pity.** Constant self-sorrow is a one way ticket to loneliness. Self-pity denies we have a responsibility to deal with our emotions and thus frustrates any cure. As Jesus said, coming after Him means we deny our self (Luke 9:23).

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[1] MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

[2] McGee, J. Vernon, *David: A Man After God’s Own Heart*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc.) 2001, c2000.

[3] McGee, J. Vernon, *David: A Man After God’s Own Heart*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc.) 2001, c2000.

[4] McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

# The Consequence Engine

## COR: Message Twenty-Two (051016AM)

This morning all of us operate under some very powerful but often unseen laws around us. These are the laws of the physical universe. The laws of gravity, chemistry, and physics are inflexible, unstoppable and very unforgiving—and we all must bow before them.

But what we seldom consider are the other laws, the ones that govern the spiritual world that surrounds us. In the pits of despair David learned about those laws. It is a law that says that there are unavoidable consequences for our choices. And David wanted positive consequences—he didn't like the negative ones he experienced in the pits he had gone through.

David disobeyed God and something happened—called a consequence. He was saddened, troubled, fretful, anxious, depressed and finally despairing. When he sat back and analyzed all that had happened he realized that the Lord allowed all that as a consequence for all of his actions.

Look with me at Psalm 57:7. Here David declares that his heart is fixed. He declared that he would not slip back into the pits of despair again by going his own way in his own strength. He learns how to minister in a place where troubles surround him without being dragged down by those around him.

David goes on to the most fruitful years of his life with an unbroken string of spiritual and material triumphs. He rises to the highest levels of leadership, worship, and heritage. What an incredible time of his life. And all that seems to start right here in Psalm 57. So this is a crucial Psalm for our spiritual nurture and development.

In Psalm 57 David had learned a law of the spiritual universe--there is a consequence for every act that is unavoidable. As sure as the laws of nature are the laws of the spiritual world; and that law can be called the consequence engine.

But before we get into these precious treasure laden verses—go back with me to this concept of the consequence engine. Let me explain it as we turn to Galatians 6:7-9

*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart*

We need to see God reflected in the world around us and then consider the implications of what His Word teaches us. Ray Stedman (1917-1992), a giant of Bible expositors of a generation ago writes:

"All of us have had some sample, some contact, some encounter with the power of nature -- we are awed by the mighty thundering of a storm that breaks upon our heads suddenly, or by the

power of breakers dashing upon the shore...God is a God of power, and that power indicates to us a force behind nature. Nature is alive with power. We are told that everything is in motion -- the atoms that constitute this pulpit are constantly in motion. And behind the motion is the pulsating force of energy. Nature is one great mass of energy.

"But, more than that, all of us have experienced some knowledge of the sovereignty of God in nature. We don't play around with the laws of nature. Have you noticed that? When we discover a natural law, we are careful to observe it because, oftentimes, our very lives are at stake.

"You don't go fooling around with the law of gravity. You don't get on top of a 15-story building and shove your hands in your pockets and nonchalantly stroll over the ledge to show people how superior you are to the law of gravity. You won't break the law of gravity -- you'll just illustrate it. They'll just scoop you off the pavement!

"We don't play around with the laws of electricity. When a wire is charged with 10,000 volts, we know that it will operate according to a strict and precise law, and we are careful to observe that law because one little mistake is enough to cause us to forfeit our life[1].

Remember that not only are there great "natural" (built-in) laws at work in the physical realm, so there are also even more important laws at work in the spiritual realm. Those laws tell us that God is Just, as well as Loving and Merciful.

God always rewards good and eventually punishes all evil. No detail, no matter how minute--escapes His attention.

Most lost people and many immature believers speculate that God, because He is good, grants some type of general amnesty to people, adding up good deeds, subtracting the bad, and throwing in some extra mercy here and there, so that just about everybody can make it to heaven somehow.

Nothing could be further from Christ's Word in the Bible. Every human choice and every action has consequences, whether good or ill. We are all affected by the choices others make as well! This reality of consequences and God's Laws that govern the physical and spiritual universe I'd like to call—"The Consequence Engine".

That's why our study of David's life, verse-by-verse through the Psalms is so vital.

As we walk through each of the pages of God's Word we can see God's Laws at work in and around David's choices. And, as we see this inspired record of God's dealings with him, we can better choose our course—knowing that God and His laws are unchanging.

### **The Consequence Engine Operates for Everyone in Daily Life**

Consequences abound in our lives. Driving over the speed limit can get us a speeding ticket. Driving under the influence can have more severe consequences. Not paying the rent usually

causes a renter to lose his residence. Not showing up for work on time can get one fired. The slightest disobedience to the Drill Sergeant in military basic training can prove painfully costly.

"Sensible" people who are law-abiding and "moral" cause less trouble for themselves in this life, and are better off as long as they live--compared to the person who is irresponsible, or promiscuous, who abuses booze and drugs and can't hold a job.

Neither type of individual may end up in heaven, but this present life is better off for people who see the intrinsic order in the world and who follow it as best they can, even if their motives are self-serving, and even if they do not know God.

Always remember that God takes note of everything going on--nothing escapes his notice, especially a person's motives.

*1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God. (NIV)*

### **The Consequence Engine Operates for Pagans**

Most people are not interested in knowing the real God. They are actually enemies of God. This general animosity towards the real God is the main cause of the invention of earth's many religions. God gives everyone enough knowledge of His existence and of His attributes so that all men everywhere are without excuse, (Romans 1:18-21). When people hear, but reject, the gospel of Jesus Christ, God ordinarily leaves such people alone and they live out the rest of their lives--often in relative peace and even prosperity.

There seem to be no immediate obvious negative consequences to their unbelief. But because the silent, invisible wrath of God rests upon all men who reject Him--there is gradually increasing emptiness in the lives of those who refuse God's grace and mercy (John 3:36). In Ecclesiastes, Solomon states clearly that enjoyment in life is a gift from God *given only to those who please Him*--and not obtainable any other way!

*Ecclesiastes 2:24 Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.*

The consequence engines of life, inexorable and unavoidable though they may be--do not usually bring immediate consequences in response to our actions. An old Proverb says, "The mills of God's justice grind exceedingly slow--but they grind exceedingly fine."

Because we often do not see the negative consequences of our bad choices right away, we are often persuaded to make bigger and more foolish mistakes. Because God's judgments are usually long delayed in time, many think the Lord never judges anyone at all.

For the pagan "the wages of sin"--which is death--are inevitable, inexorable, and unavoidable. Sin also pays lost people back with boredom, guilt, shame, loneliness, confusion, emptiness, loss

of purpose, but, in the end, not only with physical death itself—they must also face final separation from God—because they never laid hold of the saving life of Christ.

Paul, Peter, John, and Jesus all clearly state that some forms of life-style behavior exclude a person from entry into the kingdom of God altogether, thus revealing that many who *say* they are Christians never were in the first place (Matthew 7:21-29)! A list of these moral absolutes in the universe is found in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and yet another in Ephesians 5:1-6.

The record books of life are being kept up daily by recording angels who miss no details. Judgment is totally fair and just—even for the lost. Punishment is appropriately proportional, following the great principle outlined in Romans 2--God weighs the motives of the heart as well as behavior, and He takes into account the individual's actual knowledge of God.

Nonbelievers do not cease to exist when they die, nor do they pass into limbo or purgatory. After death they end up intact and conscious at the "last" judgment described in Revelation 20:12-13.

*Revelation 20:12-13 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.*

### **The Negative Consequence Engine Also Operates for Believers**

Negative consequences in time and eternity occur when a follower of Jesus Christ does things in his or her own flesh, our natural energy and strength. A number of New Testament passages highlight this:

*Galatians 5:19-21 Now **the works of the flesh** are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

*Galatians 6:7-9 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who **sows to his flesh** will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*

One of the features of the negative consequence engine at work is that we do not get to choose the consequences of our sins.

All sin is forgivable but--all sin *also* has consequences.

Christians are not judged for their sins--which have been paid in full by Jesus--but certainly we are thoroughly evaluated for all our choices in life--like everyone else. *All of our choices in life have negative or positive consequences.*

As a child, I grew up watching my parents minister to men from our local rescue mission. My dad always said, "God saved their soul but He doesn't give them a new stomach or liver!" Many of those radiant faced new converts went on to have years of terrible health problems—negative consequences of poor choices earlier in their lives.

So, just what possible consequences can there be for us who are in Christ? Negative consequences can involve lost opportunities for service, increased vulnerability to the same bad choices the next time we are tempted, and in some cases even an early death.

The consequence engine is regulated by the law of sowing and reaping in life. This great truth has never been revoked, altered, or amended. The consequence engines connected with sowing and reaping run with 100% reliability century after century in every generation.

*Galatians 6:7-9 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; **for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.** 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*

Although we often forget about it, both halves of this verse impact all of us. In reality, most Christians find we may still be reaping the unpleasant long-term consequences of past bad choices and at the same time, as forgiven sinners, we are probably also sowing to the Spirit for a future positive harvest.

Sin *always* pays us back with boredom, guilt, shame, loneliness, confusion, emptiness, loss of purpose, not to speak of--loss of rewards.

This was happening to David as we followed him through Psalm 13, 34, 40, and 70. His bad choices led to guilt and shame, produced numbing loneliness, profound confusion, emptiness, and a complete loss of purpose. When we suffer through similar times we need to look back and see if there are consequences of choices we have made also at work.

The negative consequence engine for the Christian should never be thought of as punishment for sins--because Jesus has already been fully punished for the believers sins--all of them. Consequences of our bad choices is not the same thing as punishment for sin. Neither is it to be confused with God's corrective discipline of his wayward sons and daughters (Hebrews 12:6-17).

## **The Positive Consequence Engine**

Like negative consequences in life, the effects of the positive consequence engine at work in our lives do not usually show up immediately--they are long term.. This is frustrating for folks who want instant gratification and who expect a daily rewards balance sheet.

The big pay off for followers of Jesus is in the next life--not here and now, as Jesus reminds us in His sermon on the mount.

*Matthew 6:19-21 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but **lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Much of consequence that is positive is also internal. Positive consequences of knowing God include wonderful inner qualities of wholeness, fulfillment and contentment. As we yield in obedience to the Lord, over time we become all we ever dream of being as whole men and women. God produces in and through us "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23)

We only have two choices in life—pleasing God by what we do or pleasing our self. Paul explained in Romans, that we are all servants (slaves), and there are only two choices of which master we choose to serve:

*Romans 6:16-23 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? 17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. 19 I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. 20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. 22 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

We only have two building materials in life—what will last and what will not. That is another New Testament description of the consequence engine at work in the life of the Christian. What we do (build) in life will either endure or we will suffer loss:

*1 Corinthians 3:10-15 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 **If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.** 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

*2 Corinthians 5:10-11 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that **each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.** 11 Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.*

## **The Positive Consequences in Life Are Empowered by God's Spirit**

What counts in life--actions that lead to positive consequences, are the works Jesus does in and through us when we make ourselves available to God. God does not want our best efforts on his behalf! The basic rule of Christian life is "nothing coming from me, everything coming from Him." We are not to give God our very best efforts. Self-improvement programs are of no avail. "Trying harder" doesn't cut it.

However, it is by trusting and acting on what God has promised that we unleash the power of God working in us so that the consequence engine runs in our favor. That is again the reason for David's declaration in the middle of Psalm 57—his heart was fixed on God. His will was yielded, his life was offered as a sacrificial offering. As Paul said over and over—he was God's servant or slave.

Jesus is more than willing to live through us whenever we give Him permission. Someone has said, "There is no limit to what God will do through any individual, if that person doesn't are who gets the credit."

Usually when we come to know the Lord we abandon those bad habits which everyone agrees are socially undesirable--such as getting drunk, living in a life style that is sexually immoral, being dishonest in business, lying, stealing, cheating--and so on.

What is harder to recognize and deal with regarding the flesh is its "good" side. A tragic example of not dealing with the "good side" of the flesh is contained in the account of King Saul's loss of his throne in 1 Samuel 15.

In God's sight, there is nothing at all in us--in our natural lives--that is able to please Him. We must die and be replaced by Christ living in and through us day by day, year after year.

*Matthew 16:24-27 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, **let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.** 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.*

*Galatians 2:19-21 For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and **the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.** 21 I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."*

Identifying the "flesh" in our lives is a life-long task--the flesh will do anything to avoid being put to death. We do not readily recognize the flesh in ourselves apart from our daily obedience to Jesus--and our ongoing feeding on the Word of God. Hebrews offers key insights into our day to day walk in the Spirit.

*Hebrews 4:10-13 For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. 11 Let us therefore **be diligent to enter that rest**, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, **and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart**. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*

We need to thoughtfully and deliberately respond to the truth of God's Word that we have heard today. I know of no more clearer pathway to killing our selfishness and encouraging consecration than the life purpose adopted by Thomas Chisholm in his poem *Living for Jesus*.

Why not stand and join me in affirming again these flesh crucifying, life consecrating words. Decide today that you want to sow to the Spirit, denying and crucifying your flesh, and make every day a day of Living for Jesus:

Living for Jesus a life that is true, striving to please Him in all that I do, yielding allegiance, glad-hearted and free—this is the pathway of blessing for me.

Living for Jesus who died in my place, bearing on Calv'ry my sin and disgrace—such love constrains me to answer His call, follow His leading and give Him my all.

Living for Jesus thru earth's little while, my dearest treasure the light of His smile, seeking the lost ones He died to redeem, bringing the weary to find rest in Him.

**Chorus:** O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee, for Thou in Thine atonement didst give Thyself for me. I own no other Master—my heart shall be Thy throne: My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ, for Thee alone.

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[1] Ray C. Stedman, <http://raystedman.org/romans1/0006.html>

# Living and Working with a Tough Crowd

## COR: Message Twenty-Three (051023AM)

In Psalm 57, David was called to live with a tough crowd. They were with him morning, noon, and night. He couldn't escape them. It would have been easier to just walk away from the whole situation, but that was not God's plan.

God's Word affirms four truths this morning. Life is hard, pain is real, suffering is unavoidable and weariness with life is normal. That is what David found, and that is what most people who are honest will tell you.

*Job 5:7 Yet man is **born to trouble**, As the sparks fly upward.*

*Acts 14:22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "**We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.**"*

*2 Timothy 3:12 Yes, and **all** who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus **will suffer** (lit. 'will be pursued by) **persecution**.*

*1 Peter 4:12-14 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial (#4451 purosus roasting in fire) which is to try (#3986 peirosmos tempt) you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: <sup>13</sup>But rejoice (present active imperative) inasmuch as ye are partakers (#2841 koinoneo verb of fellowship koinonia) of Christ's sufferings (pathema from pathos feelings); that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. <sup>14</sup>If ye be reproached (#3679 oneidizo throw in teeth) for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.*

So what are we to do when our personal troubles intersect with our work or school life? The answer is found in God's Word.

Look at the introduction to Psalm 57. Where is David? Yes, entering the cave.

Now look at Psalm 142. Where is he now? Living in the cave.

Remember that these two Psalms are the turning point in David's life. These are the crucible where we see his character refined more than any other place.

Our world is so much like David's. God called David to minister in a cave of troubles. He was to minister while in this cave, and he was to minister to those who were with him in the cave. Desperate, debt laden and distressed men were all around—David was their captain.

Has God called you to minister in a cave of troubles? Well let me ask you—do you work somewhere? Then you are surrounded by troubled people. Are you married? Then you have the potential for troubles. Do you have children? Then again—you are open to troubles.

Each of us is called to minister and to do so no matter what troubles surround us. And to go beyond just existing, hanging on, and enduring—we are to minister to those around us who are troubled.

When God puts us into a place where we face constant troubles, and it is not because of any willful disobedience on our part—what good can it do.

Caves of troubles, hard times that won't go away—are the places of some of the greatest blessings and growth in our lives.

From history we can see the way that some faced their troubles and triumphed. Here are just a few from history:

- Cripple him, and you have a Sir Walter Scott.
- Lock him in a prison cell, and you have a John Bunyan.
- Bury him in the snows of Valley Forge, and you have a George Washington.
- Raise him in abject poverty and you have an Abraham Lincoln.
- Strike him down with infantile paralysis, and he becomes Franklin Roosevelt.
- Burn him so severely that the doctors say he'll never walk again, and you have a Glenn Cunningham who set the world's one-mile record in 1934.
- Deafen him and you have a Ludwig van Beethoven.
- Have him or her born black in a society filled with racial discrimination, and you have a Booker T. Washington, and a George Washington Carver....
- Call him a slow learner, and write him off as uneducable, and you have an Albert Einstein.[1]

The same is true in God's Word. Capture him and send him off as a POW in a far off land and you have a Daniel.

Now for David whose life we are observing—have him grow up as the last child, overlooked and neglected—and you have *David the shepherd boy*.

Have him accused and rejected by his brothers and slighted by his countrymen—and you have *David the giant killer*.

Have him on the run for his life, hiding in a cave surrounded by hundreds of emotional porcupines—and you have David the sweet Psalmist of Israel.

David goes on to the most fruitful years of his life with an unbroken string of spiritual and material triumphs. He rises to the highest levels of leadership, worship, and heritage. What an incredible time of his life. And all that seems to start right here in Psalm 57. So this is a crucial Psalm for our spiritual nurture and development.

Now, go back three thousand years ago, into the harsh conditions of the cave of Adullam we can start to see the emotional and physical furnace of adversity and affliction that David had entered.

David wrote down how God helped him to minister to these desperate men. The group that came to live and work around him were so representative of what the culture around us is all about. They were distressed, drowned by debt, and discontented with life. Isn't that an apt description of an average American these days? And as we find in Psalm 57, David was able to minister to them.

David also learned how to not get his life and emotions dragged down by those around him. As we read these verses note the emotional condition of everyone that joined up with David. They were a very needy group. And in all their need, they invaded the life of someone just coming out of the pits. It was just the right recipe for a relapse by David into despair and a return into the pits. But the good news is—that didn't happen, and the reason why is just what we are going to learn from God's Word.

This psalm brings us to another delightful cluster of psalms (56-60) known as the *michtam* psalms. What does *michtam* mean? It speaks of that which is substantial, or enduring, or fixed. *Michtam* literally means “engraved” or “permanent.” So these *michtam* psalms have to do with that which is permanent and enduring, that which is substantial and lasting.

**My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise [Ps. 57:7].**

David is saying—

- I'm not going back to trying to rescue myself like I did in Gath (Psalm 34) and miserably failed.
- I'm not going back to refusing to look at You and feeling abandoned (Psalm 13) and suffering through those long dark days.
- I'm not going back to laying in the mud of my sin and despair (Psalm 40, 70) in the pits of life.

No, my heart is fixed. I am holding on from now on to You! Here is how I will minister when surrounded by troubles.

The word David uses gives us a perfect picture of what the Lord of our life wants to accomplish in us through the caves of trouble we endure.

A heart to minister in a cave of troubles is a heart that is “fixed”. Fixed on what? Look at the other times this Hebrew word *kuwn* is used. A heart to minister is--

A heart prepared to seek God's Word. *Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had **prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.** [like Ezra's]*

A life ordered by God's Word. *Psalm 37:23 The **steps** of a good man are **ordered by the Lord,** And He delights in his way.*

A way established by God's Word. *Psalm 40:2 He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And **established my steps.***

A spirit renewed by God's Word. *Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And **renew a steadfast spirit within me.***

Emotions anchored by God's Word. *Psalm 112:7 He will not be afraid of evil tidings; **His heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord.***

A walk directed by God's Word. *Psalm 119:133 **Direct my steps by Your word,** And let no iniquity have dominion over me.*

A mind guarded by God's Word. *Proverbs 16:3 Commit your works to the Lord, And **your thoughts will be established.***

A heart guided by God's Word. *Proverbs 16:9 A man's heart plans his way, But **the Lord directs his steps.***

That is the key to living triumphantly through the caves of life. Can I repeat what God has offered us?

A heart prepared; A life ordered; A way established; A spirit renewed; Emotions anchored ; A walk directed ; A mind guarded ; and a heart guided! That is worth all the trouble it took for David to get it.

From this cave time David goes on to the most fruitful years of his life with an unbroken string of spiritual and material triumphs. He rises to the highest levels of leadership, worship, and heritage. What an incredible time of his life.

And all that seems to start right here in Psalm 57. So this is a crucial Psalm for our spiritual nurture and development.

So let's go to the place where David learned to live in the midst of troubled people. Three types of men came: those who were in distress, those who were in debt, and those who were discontented. Here are four lessons we can trace from this Psalm. They parallel the situation in life we face in an unexpected breakdown of our car.

1. **When Troubles come—David pulls over and calls for help from the Lord. HIS HOPE IS IN THE LORD.** (v. 1-3) In his earlier life we see David in great distress. David's problems in I Samuel 24 are the backdrop as he searches for strength in Psalm 57. He finds it in God Himself. Remember, he is in a weak time in life. This is when depression often hits.
  - *Psalm 57:1-3 Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, **Until these calamities have passed by.** 2 I will cry out to God Most High, To God who performs all things for me. 3*

*He shall send from heaven and save me; He reproaches the one who would swallow me up. God shall send forth His mercy and His truth.*

So what is my plan when trying to minister? When troubles come we first must cry out to the Lord, put in a call.

2. **Then David waits for the Tow Truck. HIS STRENGTH COMES FROM THE LORD.** (v. 1-11) Note that David talks about God seven times, That is a complete set. He is saying that God is enough. God and God alone is enough. He knew, and trusted, and rested in—the God who is enough!

- *Psalm 57:1-11 Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. 2 I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me. 3 He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me; Selah God sends his love and his faithfulness. 4 I am in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts -- men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords. 5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. 6 They spread a net for my feet -- I was bowed down in distress. They dug a pit in my path -- but they have fallen into it themselves. Selah 7 My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. 8 Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. 9 I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. 10 For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies. 11 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. (NIV)*

3. **Sitting in the waiting room he grows. HIS DISCOVERIES ARE NOW ABOUT THE LORD.** (v. 1, 5, 7, 11) For emphasis, note how David doubles three aspects of God's nature.

- This is what David finds: God is Gracious, God is Steadfast, God is Praise Worthy.
- With this truth to hold onto, he testifies that it works. And he gets his focus off his troubles. He went beyond his cave world and onto Lord!!

*Psalm 57:1 Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. Psalm 57:5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. And in v.7 My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. And in v. 11 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. (NIV)*

4. **Finally David drives off from the situation deeply blessed for the hard time. HIS FOCUS IS ON THE LORD.** (v. 5, 11) Finally David gets God's perspective that lifts him above the storm of Saul's murderous pursuit, above the din of hundreds of needy and desperate men—and into the peaceful calm around the Throne of God! More than any self pity or gloom, he clings to the Lord.

***When we are at our depths—God is inviting us to His heights!***

*Psalm 57:4-5, 10-11 I am in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts— men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords. 5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. 10 For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; **your faithfulness reaches to the skies.** 11 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.*

As a New Testament writer Paul reminds us:

Romans 5:1-5 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

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[1] Charles R. Swindoll, *The Quest for Character*, Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1987 p. 84

# Life in the Minor Key

## COR: Message Twenty-Four (051030AM)

Most of the Bible seems to be lived in the major key. Saints fearlessly witnessing, churches valiantly serving against all odds—and what a joy those sections are to our souls.

But side-by-side with all that is the minor key. God's Word contains true glimpses into the weaknesses and frailties that God understands and shows us in the lives of some of His greatest saints. These are men and women who were sad, discouraged, and depressed—yet the Lord does not correct them and tell them they are in sin. He just encourages them and helps them go on.

Life in the minor key—is it always sin that makes us depressed? Is it always a sin to be depressed? No is the answer from God's Word.

We have come to Psalm 142, and as you open there with me we enter into David struggling with depression. In verse seven he asks the Lord to bring his soul out of prison. The cave, the pursuit of Saul, the men and all their troubles had locked him down emotionally—it was keeping him from the joy of his walk with the Lord he loved.

- *Psalm 142:7 "Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name; the righteous shall surround me, for You shall deal bountifully with me." (NKJV)*
- *Psalm 142:7 "Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me." (NIV)*
- *Psalm 142:7 "Bring my soul out of prison, So that I may give thanks to Thy name; the righteous will surround me, for Thou wilt deal bountifully with me." (NASB)*

### A SHARED STRUGGLE

What do Paul, Ezra, Hezekiah, Job, Elijah, Moses, Jeremiah, Jonah and David all share in common with us today? They were all spirit filled servants of the Lord, and they all struggled with negative emotions.

Our question to answer this morning from God's Word is--can believers struggle with emotional problems and still be spirit filled servants of the Lord?

I looked up depression in the Webster's dictionary and found it fascinating:

1. a state of feeling sad; a disorder marked especially by sadness, inactivity, difficulty in thinking and concentration, a significant increase or decrease in appetite and time spent sleeping, feelings of dejection and hopelessness, and sometimes suicidal tendencies
2. A reduction in activity, amount, quality, or force; a lowering of vitality or functional activity

We must be careful to not say that anxiety, depression, discouragement and other negative emotions are in themselves sinful. This is because we see these same emotions in God's servants.

In Christ we see anger that is not sin, deep emotional distress, grief, and anguish all of which were perfectly displayed. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he "began to be very distressed and troubled. And He said to them, 'My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death' "(Mark 14:33-34). Jesus, in coming to earth, took upon himself the form of a human with all its frailties, yet he did not sin.

The key is not to call each occurrence of a negative emotion sin—the key is to not stay there. That is what David explains to us. “The Christian who remains in sadness and depression really breaks a commandment: in some direction or other he mistrusts God—His power, providence, forgiveness”[1]

As we open God's Word, look how these key servants of the Lord all suffered from crippling and sometimes even paralyzing depression.

1. **Moses:** *Numbers 11:14-15 "I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me. 15 If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now—if I have found favor in Your sight—and do not let me see my wretchedness!"*
2. **Elijah:** *1 Kings 19:4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!"*
3. **Hezekiah:** *2 Kings 20:2-3 Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the Lord, saying, 3 "Remember now, O Lord, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what was good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.*
4. **Job:** *Job 3:11 "Why did I not die at birth? Why did I not perish when I came from the womb?"*
5. **Ezra:** *Psalms 119:25 "My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to Your word."*
6. **David:** *Psalms 142:7 "Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name; the righteous shall surround me, for You shall deal bountifully with me."*
7. **Jeremiah:** *Lamentations 1:20 "See, O Lord, that I am in distress; my soul is troubled; my heart is overturned within me, for I have been very rebellious. Outside the sword bereaves, at home it is like death."*
8. **Jonah:** *Jonah 4:8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."*
9. **Paul:** *2 Corinthians 7:5-6 "For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. 6 But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus;" (NASB)*

Have God's servants fared any better than these from the Bible over the past centuries? Let listen to a few of the best know saints:

The great hymn we all love to sing, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* was penned by the great 16th-century reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546)-during his darkest days of depression. It was a testimony to God's power to lift him out of the prison of his soul, back to hope and strength.

As a devoted pastor, he sought to bring spiritual counsel to struggling souls. His compassion for those souls shines in numerous places, including his sermons, lectures, Bible commentaries and table talks[2]. Besides observing mental difficulties in others, Luther had a greater reason to affirm their reality--Luther himself endured many periods of depression.

## **TEMPTATION AND STRUGGLES WITH NEGATIVE EMOTIONS ARE NOT SIN**

Luther described his personal experience in varied terms: melancholy, heaviness, depression, dejection of spirit; downcast, sad, and downhearted. He suffered in this area for much of his life and often revealed these struggles in his works. Evidently he did not think it a shameful problem to be hidden.

The famous preacher Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892), who lit the fires of the nineteenth-century revival movement, struggled so severely with depression that he was forced to be absent from his pulpit for two to three months a year. In 1866 he told his congregation of his struggle:

“I am the subject of depressions of spirit so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I go to.”

Those words were spoken in a sermon by Charles Haddon Spurgeon whose marvelous ministry in London made him perhaps the greatest preacher England ever produced.

The next great man of God after Spurgeon was also called in his day “The Greatest Preacher in the English-speaking World”—Dr. John Henry Jowett (1864-1923). He pastored leading churches, preached to huge congregations, and wrote books that were bestsellers. In a message he also confessed:

“You seem to imagine that I have no ups and downs, but just a level and lofty stretch of spiritual attainment with unbroken joy and equanimity. By no means! I am often perfectly wretched and everything appears most murky.”

I could go on and on through the “Who’s Who” of ministry and find countless other testimonies that say the same. So the answer to our question is a definite yes: Spirit-filled Christians can experience emotional problems. And some godly believers will always struggle with being “down”.

In many cases as we look back on history we can conclude that many of these saints suffered because of physical conditions that prompted depression. One Christian medical doctor who has spent his lifetime helping people writes this:

“Consider this thought experiment. Give me the most saintly person you know. If I were to administer certain medications of the right dosage, such as thyroid hormone, or insulin, I could virtually guarantee that I could make this saint anxious with at least one of these agents. Would such chemically induced anxiety be explained as a spiritual sin? What if the person's own body had an abnormal amount of thyroid hormone or insulin and produced nervousness?”[3]

We as believers should never condone willful sin, but we must learn to accept that some fellow believers may suffer from emotional symptoms that are not the result of personal unconfessed sin.

It is possible to feel horrible and be in great emotional anguish and still be obedient to the Lord. As we saw, listen again to what Job cried out in the midst of his suffering.

"I cannot eat for sighing; my groans pour out like water.... My life flies by—day after hopeless day.... I hate my life.... For God has ground me down, and taken away my family.... But I search in vain. I seek him here; I seek him there, and cannot find him.... My heart is broken. Depression haunts my days. My weary nights are filled with pain.... I cry to you, O God, but you don't answer me" (3:23-24; 7:6, 16; 16:7; 23:8; 30:16-17, 20, LB).

Notice that even with his depression, the Bible says, "In all this Job did not sin" (1:22). Moreover, God reproves Job's friends for accusing Job of sin and for their "failure to speak rightly concerning my servant Job" (42:7-8).

## PAUL SHARED HIS STRUGGLES

There are only ten basic words for suffering in the Greek language, and Paul uses five of them in this letter of Second Corinthians. Most frequently he uses *thlipsis*. This word means “narrow, confined, under pressure.” In 2 Corinthians it is translated *affliction* (2 Corinthians 2:4; 4:17), *tribulation* (2 Corinthians 1:4), and *trouble* (2 Corinthians 1:4, 8). Paul’s emotions responded to his circumstances. He felt hemmed in by difficulties, and the only way he could look was up. And that is exactly the lesson David had learned a thousand years before Paul, in Psalm 142.

As believers our joy is internal, and like our hope is from above. Look at Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:8. Even though Paul was discouraged by his circumstances, he still had spiritual joy. Discouragement is no respecter of persons. In fact, discouragement seems to attack the successful far more than the unsuccessful; for the higher we climb, the farther down we can fall.

- *2 Corinthians 1:8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.*

We are not surprised then when we read that the great Apostle Paul was “pressed out of measure” and “despaired even of life” (2 Corinthians 1:8). Great as Paul was in all of his spiritual maturity, he was still human just like the rest of us.

When Paul did an inventory of his emotional state he described his emotions as battered as if besieged on a battlefield—with no possible earthly escape.

- *2 Corinthians 4:8-9 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed (surrounded but not cut off); we are perplexed, but not in despair ((pressed at every side but never abandoned by God); 9 persecuted, but not forsaken (end of way out but not end of hope); struck down, but not destroyed (knocked down but not knocked out)—*

Paul also in another book said that he experienced “great sorrow and unceasing grief” (Rom. 9:2) over the plight of unbelieving Israel. But no matter what his emotional state, or his circumstances, Paul knew that God is in control.

Later he wrote, "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 NASV).

So the mighty Paul was depressed. Paul did not deny the way he felt, nor does God want us to deny our emotions. Because of this spiritual transparency and honesty--Paul was never ashamed to ask Christians to pray for him.

In at least seven of his letters, he mentioned his great need for prayer support (Rom. 15:30–32; Eph. 6:18–19; Phil. 1:19; Col. 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 3:1; Philemon 22). Paul and the believers in Corinth were helping each other by prayer.

## THEY SHARED STRUGGLES, THEY SHARED PRAYERS

Difficulties should draw us closer to other Christians as we share our burdens. Difficulties can be used to glorify God. So, when you find yourself in the trials of life, remember what God has promised us, and what He has commanded us to do. Look at 2 Corinthians 1:11.

- *2 Corinthians 1:11* “you also **helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.**”

The word *sunopourgeo* translated “helping together” is used only here in the Greek New Testament and is composed of three words: 'with, under, work'. It is a picture of laborers under the burden, working together to get the job accomplished. Paul enlists the help of other believers holding him up in his emotional, physical, and spiritual struggles. This was in addition to the promise we have that the Holy Spirit also assists us in our praying and helps to carry the load (Rom. 8:26).

Turn back to I Thessalonians 5. In this chapter there are more imperative commands than in any other paragraph in God's Word. It is one of the clearest descriptions of the basic duties of a believer in Christ's church. We must take seriously Paul's fifth, sixth, and seventh command to "encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men" (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

1 Thessalonians 5:11-26

1. v.11a Therefore **comfort each other** and
2. v. 11b **edify one another**, just as you also are doing. 12 And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.
3. v. 13b **Be at peace** among yourselves.
4. v. 14a Now we exhort you, brethren, **warn** those who are unruly,
5. v. 14b **comfort** the fainthearted,
6. v. 14c **uphold** the weak,

7. v. 14d **be patient** with all.
8. v. 15a **See that no one renders evil** for evil to anyone,
9. v. 15b but **always pursue** what is good both for yourselves and for all.
10. v. 16 **Rejoice** always,
11. v. 17 **pray** without ceasing,
12. v. 18 **in everything give thanks**; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
13. v. 19 **Do not quench** the Spirit.
14. v. 20 **Do not despise** prophecies.
15. v. 21a **Test** all things;
16. v. 21b **hold fast** what is good.
17. v. 22 Abstain from every form of evil. 23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.
18. v. 25 Brethren, **pray** for us.
19. v. 26 **Greet** all the brethren with a holy kiss.

Now, go back three thousand years ago, into the harsh conditions of the cave of Adullam we can start to see the emotional and physical furnace of adversity and affliction that David had entered.

This morning as we open to Psalm 142 we find David's testimony that explains how he kept from being sidelined and paralyzed by depression. This is a divine insight into something as James said that we are all "subject to like passions".

David wrote down how God helped him to not get his life and emotions dragged down by those around him. As we read these verses note the emotional condition of everyone that joined up with David. They were a very needy group. And in all their need, they invaded the life of someone just coming out of the pits. It was just the right recipe for a relapse by David into despair and a return into the pits. But the good news is—that didn't happen, and the reason why is just what we are going to learn from God's Word.

What did this tough crowd around David do to him? They depressed him! How did David, so prone to doubt, discouragement and depression—overcome this hard, troublesome time? Psalm 142 holds the key!

Trapped in a cave David baby sat four hundred fellow fugitives. That's his address in Psalm 142. From the cave of Adullam he looks up and discovers some great truths about God. So can we.

Please listen to David's cry from the cave in Psalm 142:1-7:

*I cry out to the Lord with my voice; with my voice to the Lord I make my supplication. 2 I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare before Him my trouble. 3 When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, Then You knew my path. In the way in which I walk They have secretly set a snare for me. 4 Look on my right hand and see, For there is no one who acknowledges me; Refuge has failed me; No one cares for my soul. 5 I cried out to You, O Lord: I said, "You are my refuge, My portion in the land of the living. 6 Attend to my cry, For I am brought very low;*

*Deliver me from my persecutors, For they are stronger than I. 7 Bring my soul out of prison, That I may praise Your name; The righteous shall surround me, For You shall deal bountifully with me."*

What simple lessons can we find in cave times? **Use lonely times to grow.** One of the greatest truths we can discover is that lonely times usually accomplish great discoveries about God. David is at the depth of loneliness. He has been on the run for years and now he is hiding in a desolate cave in a crowd of malcontents, feeling very much alone. He has two choices. Stay in the cave of loneliness, descend into self-pity and sin or look up and use the time alone to grow.

And that is what we will do this evening.

But this morning, what can depression, discouragement and faintheartedness do for us? If we cry out to the Lord—it can inspire us to some of the deepest and greatest discoveries about God we can ever make.

In perhaps his deepest depression he wrote one of Christendom's greatest hymns. The Reformer who penned "*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*," Martin Luther, in 1527 wrote:

"For more than a week I was close to the gates of death and hell. I trembled in all my members. Christ was wholly lost."

And here is Luther's testimony about the great discoveries he made about God while he was, as he described the experience of much of his life as being: in melancholy, heaviness, depression, dejection of spirit; downcast, sad, and downhearted. (Hymn #26)

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;  
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing:  
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;  
His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate,  
On earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide our striving would be losing;  
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing:  
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;  
Lord Sabaoth is His Name, from age to age the same,  
And He must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,  
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:  
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,  
One little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;  
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth:

Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;  
The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,  
His kingdom is forever.

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[1] A.J. Mason, "The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians," in *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 8, p. 145.

[2] See Preserved Smith, *Luther's Table Talk*, New York: Ames Press, 1907, for a critical study of the table talks.

[3] Exposing the Myth that Christians Should Not Have Emotional Problems, Dwight L. Carlson, M.D., is the author of several books, including *Why Do Christians Shoot Their Wounded?* (IVP), from which this article has been adapted. He lives with his wife in Torrance, California.

# Bring My Soul Out of Prison

## COR: Message Twenty-Five (051030PM)

**THERE ARE NO SUPER SAINTS!** That is the first lesson of our look at David tonight. We all struggle with the same challenges in life—that is the message of James 5.17.

- *James 5:17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.*

The only other time this word "with a nature like people of Lystra" was used (Acts 14:15) they were human and not divine. Sometimes we need to realize the same thing. God's greatest servants—David, Paul, and Elijah are made of the same stuff we are. Their greatness is of God not of themselves.

**GOD WANTS TO USE US.** Life is hard, and people all around us struggle. Here is what one wife and mother who was active in church, had a wonderful home and marriage once said: "Eyes get red from weeping. The heavy weights of sorrow press down. Depression, that serpent of despair, slithers silently through the soul's back door."

Depression is debilitating, defeating, deepening gloom.

Trudging wearily through the grocery store, unable to make a simple choice, or to count out correct change.

Surveying an unbelievably messy house, piles of laundry, work undone, and not being able to lift a finger.

Doubting that God cares, doubting in my prayers, doubting He's even there.

Sitting, staring wild-eyed into space, desperately wanting out of the human race.[1]

So how can God use us? By each of us learning from the Scriptures and then applying them to our own lives. To start tonight, turn back again to I Thessalonians 5. In this chapter there are more imperative commands than in any other paragraph in God's Word. It is one of the clearest descriptions of the basic duties of a believer in Christ's church.

Why not underline or circle these commands we are to present ourselves as willing servants to our Master to fulfill?

1 Thessalonians 5:11-26

1. v.11a Therefore **comfort each other** and
2. v. 11b **edify one another**, just as you also are doing. 12 And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.

3. v. 13b **Be at peace** among yourselves.
4. v. 14a Now we exhort you, brethren, **warn** those who are unruly,
5. v. 14b **comfort** the fainthearted,
6. v. 14c **uphold** the weak,
7. v. 14d **be patient** with all.
8. v. 15a **See that no one renders evil** for evil to anyone,
9. v. 15b but **always pursue** what is good both for yourselves and for all.
10. v. 16 **Rejoice** always,
11. v. 17 **pray** without ceasing,
12. v. 18 **in everything give thanks**; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
13. v. 19 **Do not quench** the Spirit.
14. v. 20 **Do not despise** prophecies.
15. v. 21a **Test** all things;
16. v. 21b **hold fast** what is good.
17. v. 22 Abstain from every form of evil. 23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.
18. v. 25 Brethren, **pray** for us.
19. v. 26 **Greet** all the brethren with a holy kiss.

Now, go back three thousand years ago, into the harsh conditions of the cave of Adullam we can start to see the emotional and physical furnace of adversity and affliction that David had entered.

## DAVID'S SECRET

Tonight as we open to Psalm 142 we find David's testimony that explains how he kept from being sidelined and paralyzed by depression. This is a divine insight into something as James said that we are all "subject to like passions".

David wrote down how God helped him to not get his life and emotions dragged down by those around him. As we read these verses note the emotional condition of everyone that joined up with David. They were a very needy group. And in all their need, they invaded the life of someone just coming out of the pits. It was just the right recipe for a relapse by David into despair and a return into the pits. But the good news is—that didn't happen, and the reason why is just what we are going to learn from God's Word.

What did this tough crowd around David do to him? They depressed him! How did David, so prone to doubt, discouragement and depression—overcome this hard, troublesome time? Psalm 142 holds the key!

Trapped in a cave, David baby sat four hundred fellow fugitives. That's his address in Psalm 142. From the cave of Adullam, tired, weary, distressed, and depressed--David looks up and discovers some great truths about God. So can we.

Please listen to David's cry from the cave in Psalm 142:

Psalm 142:1-7

*1 I cry out to the Lord with my voice; With my voice to the Lord I make my supplication. 2 I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare before Him my trouble. 3 When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, Then You knew my path. In the way in which I walk They have secretly set a snare for me. 4 Look on my right hand and see, For there is no one who acknowledges me; Refuge has failed me; No one cares for my soul. 5 I cried out to You, O Lord: I said, "You are my refuge, My portion in the land of the living. 6 Attend to my cry, For I am brought very low; Deliver me from my persecutors, For they are stronger than I. 7 Bring my soul out of prison, That I may praise Your name; The righteous shall surround me, For You shall deal bountifully with me."*

What simple lessons can we find in cave times? ***Use lonely times to grow.***

One of the greatest truths we can discover is that these lonely cave times, when we feel trapped and imprisoned by our circumstances and emotions--usually accomplish great discoveries about God.

David is at the depth of loneliness. He has been on the run for years and now he is hiding in a desolate cave in a crowd of malcontents, feeling very much alone. He has two choices. Stay in the cave of loneliness, descend into self-pity and sin or look up and use the time alone to grow.

Psalm 142 is the classic confession of David when he was a caveman, alone and depressed. God satisfied him completely as he discovered great things about God. Remember, a heart that flees to God for refuge, will always be satisfied.

That is the summary of the Life of David. What do we find as we examine the life of David? DAVID was always fleeing to Christ as his refuge. In this overview of the dark days in David's life, we see how his needs were always met by the Lord..

1. Cave times are usually accompanied by great distress. (v. 3-4) Psalm 142:3-4 When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, Then You knew my path. In the way in which I walk They have secretly set a snare for me. 4 Look on my right hand and see, For there is no one who acknowledges me; Refuge has failed me; No one cares for my soul.

In the middle of great troubles there are usually some associated symptoms of depression.

- David felt *overwhelmed in spirit* (v.3a): "Roof caving in!"; "Everything going wrong at once!"; "Always happens to me!"; "Not now!"; "I have some bad news".
- David thought his adversaries had *hidden a trap for me* (v.3b): "They're all after me"; "I've been railroaded"; "Framed".
- David feared that *no one regards me* (v.4a): "No one called..."; "I'm a nobody"; "Poor me..."; "I'm all alone".
- David also feared that there was *no escape for me* (v.4b): "One-way trip to nowhere"; "You're TOO old"; "I'm sorry but the qualifications for this position..."

- Finally, David felt that *no one cares for my soul* (v.4c). Have you ever let THESE DEADENING THOUGHT CROSS YOUR MIND? They will bring gloom as fast as a storm front in a summer's thunderstorm. But hold on -

2. Cave times usually accomplish great discoveries about God (v. 5-7) Psalm 142:5-7 I cried out to You, O Lord: I said, “You are my refuge, My portion in the land of the living. 6 Attend to my cry, For I am brought very low; Deliver me from my persecutors, For they are stronger than I. 7 Bring my soul out of prison, That I may praise Your name; The righteous shall surround me, For You shall deal bountifully with me.”

**Cave times open ways we never dreamed of for knowing God intimately.** As we look there, why don't you take a moment and mark these for someone else who may need them someday. Or even for you if you ever feel the twinge of depression in your life. Look now and find:

When depressed I learn that You alone are my true REFUGE (any time, any where) Psalm 142:5a: ***depression means its time to flee to the Lord my Refuge.*** I will believe Your promise and turn to You as my Refuge right now.

When depressed I learn that You alone are my true PORTION (just what I need). Psalm 142:5b: ***depression means its time to feed on the Lord my Portion.*** I will believe Your promise to be all I need in this hard time.

When depressed I learn that You alone are my true LISTENER (who cares and hears). Psalm 142:6 'Give heed my cry': ***depression means its time to speak to the Lord my Master.*** I will believe Your promise and pour out all my troubles to You who care for me.

When depressed I learn that You alone are my true DELIVERER (comes and helps) "bring" Psalm 142:7a: ***depression means its time to trust in the Lord my Redeemer.*** I will believe Your promise and let You rescue me now.

When depressed I learn that You alone are my true OBJECT OF WORSHIP (loves and accepts my worship) Psalm 142:7b: ***depression means its time to offer worship to the Lord my Lord.*** I will believe Your promise and worship You even when I don't feel like it.

When depressed I learn that You alone are my true PROVIDER “surround” Psalm 142:7c: ***depression means its time to rest in the Lord my Provider.*** I will believe Your promise and let You surround me now with everything I need.

Cave life yields great discoveries about God. David sings them in Psalm 142. Listen to the confessions of this caveman:

- “Lord of Refuge, You are my Portion” ( v.5),
- “O Listening One, hear my cry and Rescue me (v.6).
- “My God who Provides the righteous to gather about me, You are Sufficient” (v. 7).

3. *Cave times allow us to apply what we know is true about our God!* Now to the conclusion as the caveman confesses the end result of acting upon these great discoveries about God that he made in Psalm 57. Do you remember them from last time? David applies all those truths to his heart!

- v.1a - **God is Gracious** (Exodus 33:12 – 34:6), that means that God is gracious to even save us we are so sinful...and He has done so much more than that!
- v.1b – **God is Refuge**. He said He is (Psalm 142:5), He says it here...Look at Psalm 91. God is our shelter, protection, covering and shade. The cross is our safe harbor Hebrews 6:19 – anchored!
- v.2 – **God is able—He accomplishes**.
- v. 4/6. Interlude – enemy without because enemy within
- v.5 Solution –focus on God. **God saves**.
- v.7a – **God Establishes**. See Psalm 40 5x He....Inclined to me, heard my cry, brought me up, Set my feet, Put a new song.
- v.7b – **God makes us praise** through sorrow
- v.8-9 – **God makes us thankful**
- v.9b – **God opens an audience to us...**
- v. 10 – **God is loyal**. Lamentations 3 - mercies fail not.
- v.11 – God uses our adoring His name--to pull us out of the cave to Him!

Martin Luther, commented on the psalmist: “David must have been plagued by a very fearful devil. He could not have had such profound insights if he had not experienced great assaults.” Luther felt that those who are predisposed to fall into despondency as well as to rise into ecstasy may be able to view reality from an angle different from that of ordinary folk.” [Bainton, Here I Stand, p. 361]

Some practical steps to overcome depression are these:

1. **Deal with sin**. Be sure that there is no unconfessed or unforsaken sin left in your life to give the Devil a place in your life. (Eph. 4:27)
2. **Share your burdens**. Clearly tell the Lord all your fears, all your struggles, all your pains—remember that He knows our frame that we are dust. (Psalm 103)
3. **Abandon all self-pity**. Constant self-sorrow is a one way ticket to loneliness. Self-pity denies we have a responsibility to deal with our emotions and thus frustrates any cure. As Jesus said, coming after Him means we deny our self (Luke 9:23).

James 5:17 reminds us that Elijah was “a man of like passions,” a man of clay subject to the same trials and failures as any believer. How strange that Elijah should face 850 angry prophets and not be afraid, and then run away from the threats of one woman! Certainly there was a physical cause to his failure: the great contest on Mt. Carmel had undoubtedly wearied Elijah and drained him emotionally. Christians would do well to take better care of their bodies, especially after times of intense ministry and sacrifice (cf. Mark 6:31). But the main cause for Elijah’s failure was spiritual: he saw Jezebel and failed to see the Lord; he listened to Jezebel’s threats and forgot to wait for God’s promises. In every step he had taken, Elijah had waited for God’s command (17:2, 8; 18:1, 36), but now his fear led to impatience, and impatience led to

disobedience (Isa. 28:16). He was no longer risking his life for God's glory; rather, he was trying to save his life for his own sake.[2]

This may be encouraging to us even in common cases, if we consider that Elijah was *a man of like passions with us*. He was a zealous good man and a very great man, but he had his infirmities, and was subject to disorder in his passions as well as others. In prayer we must not look to the merit of man, but to the grace of God. Only in this we should copy after Elijah, that he prayed earnestly, or, as it is in the original, *in prayer he prayed*. It is not enough to say a prayer, but we must pray in prayer. Our thoughts must be fixed, our desires firm and ardent, and our graces in exercise; and, when we thus pray in prayer, we shall speed in prayer. Elijah *prayed that it might not rain*; and God heard him in his pleading against an idolatrous persecuting country, so that it *rained not on the earth for the space of three years and six months*. *Again he prayed, and the heaven gave rain*, etc. Thus you see prayer is the key which opens and shuts heaven. To this there is an allusion, Rev. 11:6, where the two witnesses are said to have power *to shut heaven, that it rain not*. This instance of the extraordinary efficacy of prayer is recorded for encouragement even to ordinary Christians to be instant and earnest in prayer. God never says to any of the seed of Jacob, *Seek my face in vain*. If Elijah by prayer could do such great and wonderful things, surely the prayers of no righteous man shall return void. Where there may not be so much of a miracle in God's answering our prayers, yet there may be as much of grace.[3]

Oftentimes, the great characters of the Bible the Abrahams and the Elijahs and the Pauls—are considered as *super saints* with halos around their heads to whom most people can't relate. But Elijah was no *super saint*—he was a man. That truth will be graphically illustrated over and over again throughout these studies. He was a man with feelings. As a matter of fact, James 5:17 says it this way: “Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are ....” Or simply stated, one could say, “Elijah was a man just like us ....” He had problems. I don't know if he was single or married, but if he was single, he faced the problems of loneliness; if he was married, he faced the problems of providing for a wife and kids. He was a man just like us. And it's good to keep that in mind at the beginning of this series of studies. Hence, the title of this chapter “Elijah: A Person Like You.” The difference in Elijah was not in his **genes**, but in his **faith**. He was a man who was sold out to God. He had failings. And you'll be able to identify with him along the way in some of the things that he did. But even though he was made of the same *stuff* as we are, what a challenge he is to us in the way he believed God!

Secondly, he was a man who lived in the presence of God. Look at 1 Ki 17:1 again: “... As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand ....” Elijah was living in the presence of God. He was standing in His presence and speaking with His authority. As a matter of fact, James 5:17 says, “Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, **and he prayed** ....” You see, that's the difference between Elijah and us. It's not that his nature was different than ours; it's that we have not learned to pray like he prayed. That's the difference. He was a man, but he was a man who stood in the presence of God.

## **Elijah Despondent**

“And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, 'So let the gods do to me, and more

also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.' And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life ..." (1 Ki. 19:1-3).

How could it happen that a man who had been fearless and undaunted could then lose that courage and begin to run for his life? However, such an experience often happens with the child of God. A psychologist would call it despondency. Oftentimes, after a believer's greatest spiritual victories, he finds himself in what John Bunyan called the "Slough of Despond." A Christian should not be surprised if, after some great spiritual victory, a strange period of despondency arrives on the scene.

After this great spiritual experience on the mountaintop, Ahab told his wicked wife, Jezebel, what Elijah had done. She was the hand that ruled her weak-kneed husband. She wasn't impressed with the report, but replied, "I'm not afraid of him. In 24 hours, he's going to be dead" (paraphrased).

And then a strange thing transpired. This man of God, who was willing to stand up before the prophets of Baal, in the sight of the nation, turned one hundred eighty degrees and took off in the opposite direction.

Verse 3: "And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there."

Beer-sheba is in the southern part of present-day Israel—150 miles from Jezreel! There he left his servant, but he kept going.

19:4: "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree. And he requested for himself that he might die, and said, It is enough! Now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

Why did he leave his servant there and keep going? In simple terms, he was quitting the prophetic ministry. He was not planning on coming back to what he considered to be a land that was wicked beyond help. Then after another day's journey, he sat down under a juniper tree and asked God to take his life.

What in the world happened? Where is the Elijah of Mount Carmel? Where is the Elijah who stood before Ahab and pointed his finger toward him and said, "It's not going to rain for three years until I say so!" Are we reading about the same man?

Right after a great spiritual experience is the time when Satan's attacks are the strongest. When I was a pastor, it would happen like this. After a wonderful service of blessing at church, our family would pull out of the church parking lot, and about one-half mile down the road one of the kids would become sick in the car! What a way to deflate a spiritual bubble! There is a saying, "a pastor resigns from his church every Monday." That may not be true, but many pastors can identify with the feeling!

That's what happened to Elijah. He is on the mountaintop with God, and then a few hours later, after his great spiritual experience, he's leaving town and running from one woman. Simply stated, Elijah looked at circumstances and not at the Lord. When he first stood fearlessly before Ahab his eyes were on the Lord. At the lonely brook Cherith, his eyes were on the Lord. And then when he came down, he got his eyes on Jezebel. When we take our eyes off the Lord and look at the circumstances, we become candidates for despondency.

You recall that when Peter was walking on the water, he had his eyes on the Lord, but when he saw the wind and the waves, what happened? Splash (Mt. 14:24–33)!

God used a tremendous therapy with Elijah. Verse 5–7: “And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid down again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for thee.” Despondency or despair does not always come from spiritual or emotional causes. Oftentimes, it simply comes from physical causes—lack of sleep or poor eating habits. Satan often attacks us when we're tired. That was the first step in the Lord's therapeutic treatment of Elijah's despondency. Before He ever ministered to Elijah's spirit, He ministered to Elijah's body. There are some sincere Christian *workaholics* who boast “I would rather burn out than rust out.” Such an attitude may sound very pious, but the truth of the matter is that *burning out* and *rusting out* are not the only two choices for the servant of the Lord to make. Such a choice sounds like the following: “Well, you're going to die so choose which way you want it—by the knife or by gun!”

There must be a balance where we can both abound in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58) and also come apart... and rest a while (Mk. 6:31). If we don't learn how to *come apart*, then we will soon do just that—*come apart!*

## Elijah Depressed

“And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights unto Horeb, the mount of God”(1 Ki 19:8). He kept on going! He had gone 150 miles to Beer-sheba and then he kept on going to the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula where Horeb, which is another name for Mount Sinai, was located. This was 300 miles away from Jezreel and Jezebel. He came to Mount Sinai, the place where Moses, one of his illustrious predecessors, received the law from God; the place where Israel had made a covenant with God. Why would he go there? I believe he went there because he had given up on Israel. He wanted God to renew His covenant with him alone and start a new people, just as He had done with Moses 700 years before. In other words, what God had intended to do with Moses but didn't, Elijah now desires to be done with him (Ex. 32:9–14).

Verse 9: “And he came there unto a cave [the same *cave* where Moses was covered by God's hand in Ex. 33:22?], and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the Lord came to him ....” You'll notice how that is the first time in this passage that the word of God came to Elijah. In 1 Kings 17:2, 8 and 18:1, the Bible says “the word of the Lord came unto him,” but in 19:3, it

doesn't say that. Elijah was disobedient to God in running away from Jezebel. He was not following the word of the Lord as he had at previous times.

He's had some food, he's had some rest, so he can now think clearly. So God begins to deal with his spiritual problem.

Verse 9: "... What doest thou here, Elijah?" In other words, "Elijah, why are you here? You ought to be in Israel. The people there are perishing for lack of knowledge, and you're in the wrong place." verse 10: "... I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts. For the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."

There is Elijah's depression. And now, he's in the grips of it because he's filled with self-pity. "I'm the only one left. And I've done a pretty good job, too. You've seen what I've done, Lord. I stood up to the prophets of Baal. I've stood up to Ahab" (paraphrased). Do you notice the number of I's? Elijah was a great man of God. Don't misunderstand me. My criticism of him is not because I have arrived, but because God had recorded it here for us to learn from it and appreciate it. This great man of God had taken his eyes off the Lord and started feeling sorry for himself. Have you ever felt sorry for yourself—a *pity party*, as it's called, and you're the only one invited? That's the mark of depression and despondency. "And I, even I only, am left." Elijah was in the real throes of depression, and he was useless to God. He was 300 miles away from the place that he ought to be, feeling sorry for himself. Elijah was despondent under a juniper tree; he was depressed in a cave; now notice that Elijah was delivered before the Lord.

### **Elijah Delivered**

The Lord dealt with him in verses 11 and 12: "...Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire a still, small voice." Wind, earthquakes, fire—all symbols of God's mighty power, and Elijah had known that type of ministry. He had been the one who had thundered, who had blown, who had quaked. He had been a man of power, but somehow, God was teaching him a lesson here. God was not in any of these things, but He was very present in a "still, small voice."

**God desires both great and small ministry for Him.** What was He teaching Elijah by showing him these noisy manifestations of nature followed by a quiet word? Great natural catastrophes like those mentioned can quickly destroy men's lives, but only the "still, small voice" of the Holy Spirit can regenerate men through the patient teaching of the Word. Elijah's problem was shared by the two disciples of Jesus who wanted a Samaritan village, which had refused them hospitality, to be destroyed by fire from Heaven—Elijah style! They were rebuked by the Savior for their wrong spirit (Lk. 9:55). In the same way, God does not always work in such outward displays of vengeance. Elijah's new type of ministry was to be of the "still, small voice" variety, in contrast to the preceding dramatic measures.

**God uses all of His children in varying ways.** Verse 13 and 14: “And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entrance of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.” Now God begins to deal with His depressed prophet. Verses 18: “Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.” With that answer, He dealt with Elijah’s excuse—“I’m the only one left.” In effect, God said to His prophet: “You are not indispensable, Elijah, you’re not the only one. And if you go and do something else and forsake the prophetic ministry, I may just get one of those 7,000 to do it. Don’t think that you’re a privileged character with God.” Don’t think that because you suppose you are the only one doing the work, that you have some sort of special privilege.

Dear reader, don’t think that you’re indispensable to God. You may be in the throes of despondency and despair simply because you are convinced that you have to carry the whole weight of some responsibility.

**God wants us to serve Him all the time.** Now, how does God deal with the depression of Elijah? Verses 15–17: “And the Lord said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. And Jehu, the son of Nimshi, shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel. And Elisha, the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah, shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy stead. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael, shall Jehu slay; and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu, shall Elisha slay.” He told Elijah to do three things: Anoint a king of Syria, anoint Jehu as king of Israel, and anoint Elisha as his (Elijah’s) successor. One of the greatest problems with depressed people is that they have lost their willingness to serve the Lord. They are sitting around doing nothing, feeling sorry for themselves. One of the best therapies is simply to get busy. The cure for Elijah’s depression was to get his eyes on the Lord, to recognize that he was not indispensable, and then to get busy and stop feeling sorry for himself. Get your focus outward and not inward. Get your eyes off yourself and get them on the Lord. Get your eyes off the problems and on the tasks at hand. Get busy for the Lord and stop feeling sorry for yourself. That’s the best therapy you can have. Elijah did that, and thank God, because of his tremendous deliverance at the hand of the Lord, his ministry was not over. Because he was delivered from this abominable depression, much of his greatest ministry still lay ahead. True, it was a different type of ministry. Gone were the days of Mount Carmel, but Elijah was not to be *put on the shelf*. The inspired admonition of the apostle will serve well to close this chapter of Elijah’s life. “And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9).[4]

### **Elijah's Depression**

Elijah traveled on foot about 95 miles to the southern border of Judah. Then he went another day's journey into the wilderness. By that time he was completely exhausted. He had remarkable physical strength and endurance, but he had extended himself to the breaking point. He had first prepared for the "showdown" with the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. There was great pressure on him because of satanic opposition while he was on the mountain. Then it was

necessary to kill the prophets of Baal. Such invasion of Satan's territory is not done easily. Then Elijah prayed for rain with great earnestness, and finally he ran about 16 miles to Jezreel to see what results would follow the great triumph at Mount Carmel. All of this took place in one day.

Satan knows that a tired body is an added opportunity for him, and he took advantage of it in this case. When Jezebel threatened Elijah, he seemed to lose control and continued running until he sat under the juniper tree in the wilderness.

Then he requested that he might die. He felt his labors had been fruitless. He longed for rest. "It is enough," he said (1 Kings 19:4). He had hoped to see a great revival, but no spiritual change had taken place in Israel.

Some men in the Bible went even further than Elijah did in discouragement. Jeremiah said, "Cursed be the day wherein I was born" (Jeremiah 20:14). Job wished that the day of his birth might perish (see Job 3:3). These men all had natures like ours. They showed what they could be when God filled them and controlled them and also what they were when left to themselves. If we did not have this knowledge, we would be tempted to think they were superhuman instead of ordinary people like the rest of us.

God knew that His servant had overtaxed himself and needed a renewal of his physical life as well as his spiritual life. Our inner life is very sensitive to our outward condition. Rest is very important to all of us. Proper exercise is also important. We sometimes forget this, but God does not. Our physical condition can influence our spiritual condition.

Elijah felt very much alone. He admitted this to God: "I, even I only, am left" (v. 10). Loneliness is sometimes a penalty that people pay for being great. Someone sent me the following paragraph:

When Elijah had his eyes on the Lord, he faced his foes without fear. But the moment he forgot God and concentrated on the circumstances, things changed. He looked at the danger and lost his courage. Centuries later Peter did the same thing. As long as he looked at the Lord, he walked on the water and was not afraid. The moment he looked at the waves, he became afraid and began to sink.

God looked on His servant Elijah with kindness and provided food for him. The Lord did not forget him. He followed him everywhere. Elijah learned as we should learn: "He [God] hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Psalm 103:10-14).

Elijah had lost hope of seeing the people of Israel return to the Lord. Thus life no longer was attractive to him. When hope is gone, life is not worth living. Perhaps it seemed to Elijah that the Lord had given up also, but this was not the case. The Lord did not answer the prayer of His discouraged servant when he asked to die.

The present world has no answer to the turmoil and strife going on in its midst, but the Church is not without hope. Our hope lies in the coming of our Lord. This we must never forget.

This is what He did for Elijah. "And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee" (1 Kings 19:5-7).

Elijah still had a great distance to go, but God watched over him as he slept. He was not forsaken, but was provided for through rest and food for a journey that would cover many more miles. Here we have a demonstration of the ministry of angels to those who are the elect of the Lord. God's tender care is expressed through the ministry of angels, who are servants of those who are heirs of salvation. The same angels who delight to witness God's majesty and greatness also enjoy ministering to God's saints on the earth.

This action on the part of God is typical of His nature as the God of grace. He takes no account of our worthiness or unworthiness. His grace is free and sovereign. He loves His own, and He loves them to the end.

Can you imagine an angel doing such a lowly task as cooking a meal for a discouraged saint of God, when that angel's regular assignment was to stand in the presence of almighty God and see Him in His majesty and glory? There was no grumbling on the part of this messenger. He loved to do what he did.

At times each of us feels that a different environment would make things easier for us. We will see, in Elijah's case, what a change in environment did for him, though he could have had the same experience if he had stayed in Israel. God did not forsake him. Elijah needed spiritual refreshing. He needed to get away from the duties of life for a while and be alone with the Lord. Our Savior did this quite often when he prayed.

God allowed his servant to take this long, hard journey across the desert and in grace provided for him and accompanied him. Whether or not Elijah was actually doing God's will at this time, his motive was certainly that of seeking to put God first. The Lord did not forsake him, and He will not forsake us.

We read in 1 Kings 19:8 that Elijah "arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God." Again Elijah experienced the superhuman strength provided by the Lord.

Like Elijah we all have times of discouragement. None of us are immune. Pastors are often targets of the enemy in this respect. They preach faithfully for the Lord, but see little response, if any, in the hearts of the hearers. Less important things begin to take the time of the members of their congregation. Sunday night attendance dwindles. People have little interest in prayer meetings. And the average Christian seems to have lost his zeal for witnessing to those who are unsaved.

Regardless of the cause of our discouragement, let us learn from Elijah's experience that God is never discouraged. He never gives up. When God has given us the responsibility for some work or obligation, let us learn not to give up either.

Sometimes God's plans do not coincide with our plans. Not all of His plans are short range; many of them are long range. Though he did not realize it at the time, Elijah was fitting into part of God's long-range plan for Israel.

## God's Love for Elijah

When Elijah was discouraged, he received God's love in a very special way. God did not rebuke His tired and depressed servant, but provided food, rest, protection, comfort and strength through an angel.

If he had not learned it before, Elijah learned that God's love is constant. Perhaps he may have feared that he had forfeited that love by running away from Jezebel and her threats, but God still loved him. The love of God never changes, even though our awareness of it does. The sun still shines even though it may disappear from view behind clouds or appear to go down at night.

The love of God is like that. We may not always be aware of God's love, but it surrounds us. Circumstances may surround us like a cloud or like night, but God's love is not changed. It is still with us[5].

It is often suggested that Elijah was suffering from depression. Depression can have many different causes (from suppressed anger to vitamin deficiency) and we should not assume that when we are depressed our problem is the same as Elijah's, or his the same as ours. In his case, depression and discouragement seem to have stemmed from his skewed perspective. He both underrated his own achievement and undervalued the contribution of others. The answer, in part at least, was for him to be given a glimpse of things from God's point of view. We need such glimpses too, if we are not to become discouraged in the Christian life.[6]

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[1] Swindoll, Encourage Me, pp.

[2] Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*, (InterVarsity Press: IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament ) Downer's Grove, IL.

[3] Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997.

[4] Varner W. , *The Chariot of Israel*, (Bellmawr, New Jersey: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc.) 1997.

[5] Theodore Epp, Elijah, Back to the Bible pamphlet.

[6] Carson, D.A.; et al., *The New Bible Commentary*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press) 1994.

# Flee the Lust of the Eyes - Remember Lot

## COR: Message Twenty-Six (051113AM)

Our final stop in our journey through the Scriptures finding Christ as our Refuge may be the most vital one of all. We have seen over the past few weeks that Christ is our refuge.

- ❖ He is the Refuge for all of us when we *feel uncleanness*;
- ❖ He is the Refuge for all of us when we *feel weariness*;
- ❖ He is the Refuge for all of us who *feel homelessness and loneliness*;
- ❖ He is the Refuge for all of us when our hearts darken and we *feel hopelessness and depression*; and
- ❖ He is the Refuge for all of us when we *feel helpless and weakness*;

This morning we find--He is the Refuge for all of us *when we struggle, and feel so weak when tempted*.

Over sixty years ago, a German pastor was awaiting execution on Hitler's death row. After this faithful pastor's death the following was found among his final words in his journal:

"In our members there is a slumbering inclination towards desire which is both sudden and fierce. With irresistible power desire seizes mastery over the flesh. All at once a secret, smoldering fire is kindled. The flesh burns and is in flames.

The lust thus aroused envelops the mind and will of man in deepest darkness. The powers of clear discrimination and of decision are taken from us.... It is here that everything within me rises up against the Word of God.

It makes no difference whether it is sexual desire, or ambition, or vanity, or desire for revenge, or love of fame and power, or greed for money, or, finally, that strange desire for the beauty of the world...

Joy in God is...extinguished in us and we seek all our joy in the creature. At this moment God is quite unreal to us, he loses all reality, and only desire for the creature is real; the only reality is the devil.

Satan does not here fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God.... ” [1]

Temptations around us all abound. Because temptation to sin is so powerful, we need help. This morning the best, and the only real help is Christ--the Refuge for the tempted.

Now before any of us check out because this message isn't for us, open with me to James 1.13-14.

*James 1:13-15 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn*

away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, **when desire has conceived**, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. NKJV

*James 1:13-15 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted **when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust**. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. NAS*

Note that James, the very first New Testament pastor, of the first New Testament church, the first leader of the Church of Jerusalem, and our Lord's earthly brother—*doesn't say 'if' but he says 'when'*.

God's Word says temptation is inevitable, temptation is inescapable, temptation is going to follow us all through our earthly lives.

Temptation is inevitable. So listen up, this message is for ALL of us. But this message hinges on one word—lust.

Lust (*epithumia* 'super desires') is dreadful, dangerous, and deadly. Lust is surrounding us and in various forms, planted within us—and is either pursued for pleasure or fled from for righteousness. Listen carefully to Paul—

*2 Timothy 2:22 **Flee** [P A Impv. 'I command you to always flee'] also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. NKJV*

Note he doesn't merely say when you are a youth to flee. No, he says 'youthful lusts' the lusts that we nurture and feed as young people--are going to chase us through life. So we must all decide to flee lust, no matter what our age.

However large we grow those ravenous wolves of lust in our youth—that is how large they will be as they chase us through life. Why should we flee these lusts that tempt us to sin against God? Because they cost us far more than we could ever imagine. To help you know what I mean, listen to these three scenarios.

- Scenario #1: If I were to tell you, as you were buying a home, that you were in the Tar Creek watershed and that there was such a toxic runoff that in a few years you would start having terrible sickness in your family, your children would be crippled for life, your home would end up becoming worthless, and you would have such lifelong headaches you would be unable to work or even think—would you keep on in the purchase of that house?
- Scenario #2: How about if you were applying for a job at a manufacturing plant and I told you that everyone up to this day who had run that machine had either mangled or crushed their arm in the press and were maimed for the rest of their life? Would you pause and reconsider that job offer? Even if you always wanted that job, the pay is great, the plant is convenient, the hours are perfect, and everyone else works there—would you take the job?

- Scenario #3: How about moving to a home with your family of small children, that sat too close to a busy highway crowded with cars and trucks? Would you take the home if you knew that each of the preceding families had lost a child to a traffic accident as they played in the front yard and a car or truck lost control and plowed into the yard? Of course not. You would never think that you could beat the odds and escape such a loss.

What do each of these scenarios have in common? A looming potential loss, so that making the choice is clearly foolish. Most of us when we hear such things, stop and reconsider the cost of such a choice of a job or home and decide against it. Our life, our home, our children, our job, our health—all are too vital to be risked for something that is not worth that much.

But do you look on temptation and lust as carefully? We should. God wants us to flee all forms of lust by counting what it will really cost us. God warns us over and over in His Word of the exorbitant price of lust. So what happens if we do not flee?

The consequence engines of life, inexorable and unavoidable though they may be--do not usually bring immediate consequences in response to our actions when we feed our lusts little by little.

Because we often do not see the negative consequences of our bad choices right away, we are often persuaded to make bigger and more foolish mistakes. Because God's judgments are usually long delayed in time, we think we escaped the consequence of that poor choice. But sin *always* pays us back with boredom, guilt, shame, loneliness, confusion, emptiness, loss of purpose, not to speak of--loss of rewards.

All sin is forgivable but--all sin *also* has consequences. So since lust is what entices us to sin, what are these lusts that we are to fear and flee?

- *1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the **lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life**—is not of the Father, but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.*

Temptations are enticements from our lusts. God says that lusts are packaged in varied shapes, sizes, and colors...but they fall into one of three categories:

- **We are tempted by the flesh to chase pleasures, this equals the cravings of the body.** *These are all of the sensual temptations.* This is lust for another person. The desire to have and enjoy the body of an individual, either mentally or physically, even though such pleasure is illegal and/or immoral. We can feed these lusts by going to places where we see uncovered bodies, or watching TV and movies that have various states of immodesty, or by seeking out images in magazines and online that feed these evil desires.
- **We are tempted by the eyes to chase stuff, this equals the lusting of the eyes.** *These are all of the material temptations.* This is lust for things. The things may be as large as a house or as small as a ring, as bright and dazzling as a new sports car or as dull and dusty as a two-hundred-year-old antique dresser. Lest we think that this is not as bad as

the lusts of the flesh, remember that covetousness (insatiable longing for more things) is as damnable as idol worship. That means that the lust for possessions is as wicked as the lust for immorality. Beware of both, they are deadly!

- **We are tempted by pride to chase status, this equals the boasting of the mouth.** *These are all of the personal temptations.* This is selfishness because I'm most important. This is irritableness because life revolves around me. This is untruthfulness because I need to protect myself. This is laziness because I want to rest and comfort myself. All of these are pride as well as obvious lust for status and special recognition. Pride also shows up as lust for the status of fame, fortune, power, or authority. Pride may also be wanting a title that makes heads turn, like "top executive" or "president" or "executive director" or even "doctor". In the Scriptures this was Satan's sin. Pride in all its forms is heinous to God.

Any form of lust God hates. And so any form of lust we must flee and also hate.

But what happens to those who don't flee for refuge to Christ. What happens when we allow lust to dominate us? Abraham and Lot will give us a sobering lesson.

Please turn now to Genesis 13:10. Look at Lot's choices to feed his lusts. Lot never restrained his physical eyes from controlling his life. Lot was a believer, but lived with the consequences of his lust instead of the blessings of faith.

Lot was tempted and didn't resist. In the end that small choice, as it seemed then, cost Lot everything. The steps to Lot's fatal choices are clearly written down for us in God's Word.

In four short verses we see the pathway of tragic consequence that all started with the lusts, the strong unbridled desires of the eyes.

*Genesis 13:10-13 And **Lot lifted his eyes** and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. 11 Then **Lot chose for himself all** the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. 12 Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and **Lot dwelt** in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. 13 But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord.*

First we see that **Lot lifted up 'his eyes'**, not his heart in prayer, not his soul to the Lord his Maker, just his eyes. He relied upon his flesh which would end up paying him back bitterly in the end.

Next we see God noting that **Lot 'chose for himself all'**. He took whatever was best for his agenda for life. Note that the Lord didn't even figure into that decision. No thought of the long term effect of that choice. No seeking what God might want him to do. No it was all based on what was best for himself. And with that choice he showed that Lot was living for Lot. Abraham, who lived for the Lord, as far as we know never built anything but altars, never bought any land except a plot to bury his beloved wife, and never lived in anything but a tent.

Finally we see that **Lot was comfortable with the evils of the world—‘Lot dwelt’**. The Hebrew word for pitched his tent means laced it right up against, or right on the edge. Lot clearly placed himself by the world. Not just any manifestation of the world, he wasn’t troubled at being surrounded by, living with, and sharing life with those who were ‘exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord’. These aren’t normal sinners that are lost, these were aggressive enemies of God. And Lot faced them, watched them, got comfortable with them, was drawn towards them, and finally moved in amongst them!

Thus the contrast—Lot lived for Lot, picked the best for himself, looked at life through the lens of what makes me happy and successful, amassed enough fortune to retire in the big city of wealth and entertainment, and grew cold and distant from God. Gradually any effect that living with Abraham, seeing Abraham’s altars to God, hearing about Abraham’s talks with God—all of that was gone. Lot’s heart was in Sodom long before his body arrived there.

What was the result of that small choice Lot made? Just trace quickly Lot’s steps after this point:

- He looked at Sodom from afar (Genesis 13.10-11).
- Then, he turned his tent towards Sodom (Genesis 13.12).
- And finally, he moved into Sodom (Genesis 14.12).

What did Lot’s small choice to follow the lust of his eyes cost him?

- He lost **his fellowship, accountability, and friendship with Abraham** when he separated from Abraham and moved into Sodom (Genesis 13.14). That uncle who loved him, shared God with him—was now not as interesting as the glittering lights on the horizon that marked the city of sin and fun.
- He lost **his testimony** (Genesis 19.9). The citizens of Sodom mocked him and said that he who lived among them couldn’t comment on their lifestyle choices.
- He lost **half his family** who wouldn’t leave and were destroyed with Sodom (Genesis 19.14). His own family mocked him when he warned them of God’s pending destruction of the wickedness of Sodom.
- He lost **his ability to respond** to God when he was urged to flee and he lingered so long (Genesis 19.15-16) that the angels had to drag him by the hand out of the cauldron of destruction.
- He lost **his wife** when she wanted to stay in Sodom (Genesis 19.26) so God killed her and turned her into a pillar of salt. She had been so blessed by God. She was given the opportunity to live with a man (Lot) who knew God, travel with a man who was God’s friend (Abraham) and undoubtedly hear and see the wonders of God through their lives, see angelic messengers, witness their power to push away the crowd at the door of her home, strike them with blindness, and finally to hold the hand of an angel and be pulled toward the plan of God. And all that was not enough. Her soul longed for the world, her desires were so strong she couldn’t obey the only command they gave her—‘don’t look back’.
- He lost **the rest of his family** as his remaining daughters began to act like the people they lived around so long in Sodom (Genesis 19.30-35). They knew the tricks, they had

watched the sinful ways of Sodom so long. They just did what they had learned and tricked their dad.

- He lost **his legacy** as his children were defiled and their children (Genesis 19.36-38) became the enemies of God.

*“It would be difficult to decide whether or not Lot was a truly saved man by reading his story in the Old Testament. He made no positive contribution to the life of faith. He chose the lower, the carnal, the worldly path. He left the fellowship of the faith at the earliest possible moment and was never restored to that fellowship. He made no mark for God. His family ended in disaster. The last we see of him in the narrative he is drunk and dishonored.”*

*“Indeed, were it not for a brief but remarkable statement of Peter written thousands of years later (2 Peter 2:7-8) we would be justified in concluding that the root of the matter had never been in him at all. Such is the life of a backslider. May God deliver us from a life like that.”[2]*

Lot was tempted and never seems to have resisted. God allowed him to choose to go up the hill towards Abraham and he said NO, and went down the hill towards Sodom. Look how his life turned out.

- Lot was drawn toward the wrong things, the things that were against God, not the things that were for God.
- Lot looked at Sodom (temptation of the lust of the eyes); faced his tent toward Sodom 13.10-13; and lived/moved into Sodom 14.12.
- Lot seems to have never built an altar (altars seemed to be places where Abraham marked and remembered God’s promises in his life).
- Lot was a friend of world (James 4.4); conformed to world (Romans 12.2).

Abraham was also faced with the same temptation. God had offered him everything if he would wait--and now the opportunity for a quick time of ease and pleasure was offered. Abraham said NO to the worldliness of Sodom. The only mark Abraham left of his life on earth were those altars!

- Abraham stayed a pilgrim for God in tents (Lot in Sodom);
- Abraham built altars every where he went (Lot built none);
- Abraham became a hero among all mankind (Lot ends ignominiously in incest);
- Abraham is called God's Friend 3 times (Lot fades out and his family all become God's enemies).

**If we were to contrast Abraham and Lot it would sound like this:**

<b>Lot--</b>	<b>Abraham--</b>
Was a competitor and opportunist (13.8)	Was a peacemaker
Took and grabbed (13.9)	Trusted God's Choice
Lived by the lust o his eyes (13:10-11)	Contented
Settled in a gay community (13:12-13)	Stayed a pilgrim and stranger for God

Lost His Kids (19:14)	Blessed His Children
Lost His Wife (19:26)	Kept his wife who became a mother of God's people
Defiled his daughters (19:36)	Blessed his children
Cursed His Descendents (19:38)	Blessed His Descendents
His descendents became God's enemies (19:37)	His descendents are God's chosen people
Lot's family line ended (19:38)	Abraham's family line will never end

Lot was conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2). All that he lived for went up in smoke and was buried under ruins somewhere in the area around the Dead Sea. Lot is a warning to all believers not to love the world, become friendly with the world, or be stained by the world (James 1:27), because the day of reckoning finally comes.

But that is not how it has to be. Our lives do not have to be ruined, our families do not have to be ruined by our choices. God's grace is available.

- *Titus 2:11-13 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us **to deny ungodliness and worldly desires** and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; NAS*
- *Titus 2:11-13 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to **say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions**, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, NIV*
- *Titus 2:11-13 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, **denying ungodliness and worldly lusts**, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, NKJV*

So it is possible to say no to lust. It is possible to have the force of temptation's powers lessened as we mortify our flesh by starving our lusts. All of that comes by His grace.

Hymn #201 is a testimony that "Grace [is] Greater Than All Our Sin". I want you to think about these words as we read them together.

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,  
 Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!  
 Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,  
 There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.  
 Sin and despair, like the sea waves cold,  
 Threaten the soul with infinite loss;

Grace that is greater, yes, grace untold,  
Points to the refuge, the mighty cross.  
Dark is the stain that we cannot hide.  
What can avail to wash it away?  
Look! There is flowing a crimson tide,  
Brighter than snow you may be today.  
Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,  
Freely bestowed on all who believe!  
You that are longing to see his face,  
Will you this moment his grace receive?

Refrain:

Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;  
Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that is greater than all our (MY) sin!

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[1] Swindoll, *Sensuality*, p. 10.

[2] John Phillips, *Exploring Genesis*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1980, p. 164.

# Learning to Flee the Lust of the Eyes

## COR: Message Twenty-Seven (051113PM)

This morning I began to exhort you from God's Word to flee the lust of the eyes. We saw that the lust of the eyes is the struggle Lot seemed to have.

Think about what happened to him. Lot did not sit down one day and say—you know, I want to destroy my wife, my kids, my testimony, my legacy, and my friendship with God and Abraham.

No, Satan usually doesn't work that way. Lust is Satan's tool through the back door. He takes something that is already a part of our life and distorts it. Lot's problem started with his career. He was just trying to take care of his family. His business was grazing sheep and goats. The pastures were not large enough for both his flocks and his uncle Abraham's. So he is offered a choice of where to work, where to locate his business.

It is good to be in business. Profit is the correct result of being a good businessman. Watching out for your family is commanded by God. So all that he did was right—until his lust of the eyes clicked in. What is that lust again?

**It is the temptation we all face to chase stuff, that is the lusting of the eyes.** *These are all of the material temptations.* This is lust for things. The things may be as large as a house or as small as a ring, as bright and dazzling as a new sports car or as dull and dusty as a two-hundred-year-old antique dresser. Lest we think that this is not as bad as the lusts of the flesh, remember that covetousness (insatiable longing for more things) is as damnable as idol worship. That means that the lust for possessions is as wicked as the lust for immorality. Beware of both, they are deadly!

It is the care of stuff that Jesus said makes our hearts grow cold. It is when we are rich and increased with goods that we abandon the need to hold Christ's Hand—and we set off on our own. So this evening we return to the lesson of Lot. Beware of the lust of the eyes!

One of the greatest heroes of the faith in all God's Word resides side-by-side with one of the saddest pictures of lost opportunity and squandered grace. Abraham the spiritual giant and Lot the spiritual dwarf. What a lesson about the power of lust to distract, divert, debilitate, defeat, and finally destroy a good life.

How many Abrahams and Lots walk through life side by side until the moment of truth, when one chooses to say no to lust and the other says yes. It is amazing how far apart those lives can end up that once were so close.

Abraham made little choices to be a pilgrim and stranger in this world (to the lust of flesh, lust of eyes, pride of life). But Lot made little choices to be conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2).

Abraham became the father of the covenant people of God, the father of the faithful, a hero of faith, and man who is revered by the three great monotheistic religions of the world—and most

of all, he became the friend of God. But all that Lot spent his life doing, all that Lot lived for, all that Lot labored for--went up in smoke and was buried under ruins somewhere in the area around the Dead Sea.

Abraham is the chief example of faith in the New Testament. In spite of his struggles, lapses, and sins—he never stopped seeking the Lord and following Him. But Lot is a warning to all believers not to love the world, not to become friendly with the world, and not to be stained by the world (James 1:27), because the day of reckoning finally comes.

But what is the good news? Christ is a refuge, to Him we may flee at any time. Lets learn how as we open to 2 Peter and stand to read these precious promises.

- *2 Peter 2:7-9 and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked 8 (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)— 9 then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,*

**Any form of lust God hates. And so any form of lust we must flee and also hate.**

- *Matthew 26:41 "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

Lot will forever be a lesson about what happens to those who don't flee for refuge to Christ.

But that is not how it has to be. Our lives do not have to be ruined, our families do not have to be ruined by our choices. God's grace is available.

- *Titus 2:11-13 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us **to deny ungodliness and worldly desires** and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; NAS*
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If you want to learn to flee lust, experience anew and afresh the grace of God. One of the most graced men in all the Bible was Paul—he is forever the champion of grace. He is the one that wrote Titus 2. So how did he beat the constant temptations of his day? Let's find out.

- *1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. 25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. 27 **But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection**, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*
- *1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 26 Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. 27 **No, I beat my body and make it my slave** so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. NIV*
- *1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. 25 And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; 27 **but I buffet my body and make it my slave**, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified. NAS*

Paul had a secret, he was regularly knocking himself out. The term 'discipline' is a Greek word that literally means 'to hit under the eye'. It is in the present active indicative form so it means "I am constantly hitting myself under the eye [i.e. knock out blow] and I am constantly enslaving my body ...". He knocked out the bodily impulses to keep them from preventing him from his mission that Christ bought and paid for him to do here on earth. The question each of us need to ask ourselves is—are we?

### Sometimes it is the little 'acceptable sins' that enslave us!

This morning we saw that lust in our lives that is allowed to grow unchecked can rob anyone of finishing well and earning Christ's well done. There are three areas that should concern all of us who seek Christ's full rewards in Heaven. He says:

1. Beware of **the sins of old age**: At the time when we know most about the Lord, have the least to lose because our lives are nearly over, and when we have the most reason to seek Heaven above all else—we begin to lust for comfort and convenience, get greedy for recognition and grow in our covetousness for security. Don't waste your life—especially at the end! The sins of old age can erase Christ's well done. Remember Solomon.
2. Beware of **the problem of exceptionism**, which make me think my life is an exception to God's Word. Thus I can excuse myself from doing anything for Heaven because of my past, or my pain, or my poverty, or my poor self-image. The problem of exceptionism can erase Christ's well done. Remember Annanias and Saphira.
3. Beware of **the unmortified pockets of pride**. Allowing these pockets to grow and not be dealt with can make me proud of my intellect, or proud of my achievements, or proud of my

giftedness, or even proud of my goodness. Pockets of pride in my life can erase Christ's well done. Remember Lot.

Now, please turn again to Genesis 13.10. Look at Lot's choices to feed his lusts. Lot never restrained his physical eyes from controlling his life. Lot was a believer, but lived with the consequences of his lust instead of the blessings of faith.

Lot was tempted and didn't resist. In the end that small choice, as it seemed then, cost Lot everything. The steps to Lot's fatal choices are clearly written down for us in God's Word.

In four short verses we see the pathway of tragic consequence that all started with the lusts, the strong unbridled desires of the eyes.

- *Genesis 13:10-13 And **Lot lifted his eyes** and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. 11 Then **Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan**, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. 12 Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and **Lot dwelt** in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. 13 But the men of Sodom **were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord.***

Thus the contrast—Lot lived for Lot, picked the best for himself, looked at life through the lens of what makes me happy and successful, amassed enough fortune to retire in the big city of wealth and entertainment, and grew cold and distant from God. Gradually any effect that living with Abraham, seeing Abraham's altars to God, hearing about Abraham's talks with God—all of that was gone. Lot's heart was in Sodom long before his body arrived there.

What was the result of that small choice Lot made? Just trace quickly Lot's steps after this point:

- He looked at Sodom from afar (Genesis 13.10-11).
- Then, he turned his tent towards Sodom (Genesis 13.12).
- And finally, he moved into Sodom (Genesis 14.12).

What did Lot's small choice to follow the lust of his eyes cost him?

- He lost **his fellowship, accountability, and friendship with Abraham** when he separated from Abraham and moved into Sodom (Genesis 13.14). That uncle who loved him, shared God with him—was now not as interesting as the glittering lights on the horizon that marked the city of sin and fun.
- He lost **his testimony** (Genesis 19.9). The citizens of Sodom mocked him and said that he who lived among them couldn't comment on their lifestyle choices.
- He lost **half his family** who wouldn't leave and were destroyed with Sodom (Genesis 19.14). His own family mocked him when he warned them of God's pending destruction of the wickedness of Sodom.

- He lost **his ability to respond** to God when he was urged to flee and he lingered so long (Genesis 19.15-16) that the angels had to drag him by the hand out of the cauldron of destruction.
- He lost **his wife** when she wanted to stay in Sodom (Genesis 19.26) so God killed her and turned her into a pillar of salt. She had been so blessed by God. She was given the opportunity to live with a man (Lot) who knew God, travel with a man who was God's friend (Abraham) and undoubtedly hear and see the wonders of God through their lives, see angelic messengers, witness their power to push away the crowd at the door of her home, strike them with blindness, and finally to hold the hand of an angel and be pulled toward the plan of God. And all that was not enough. Her soul longed for the world, her desires were so strong she couldn't obey the only command they gave her—'don't look back'.
- He lost **the rest of his family** as his remaining daughters began to act like the people they lived around so long in Sodom (Genesis 19.30-35). They knew the tricks, they had watched the sinful ways of Sodom so long. They just did what they had learned and tricked their dad.
- He lost **his legacy** as his children were defiled and their children (Genesis 19.36-38) became the enemies of God.

Lot was tempted and never seems to have resisted. God allowed him to choose to go up the hill towards Abraham and he said NO, and went down the hill towards Sodom. Look how his life turned out.

- Lot was drawn toward the wrong things, the things that were against God, not the things that were for God.
- Lot looked at Sodom (temptation of the lust of the eyes); faced his tent toward Sodom 13.10-13; and lived/moved into Sodom 14.12.
- Lot seems to have never built an altar (altars seemed to be places where Abraham marked and remembered God's promises in his life).
- Lot was a friend of world (James 4.4); conformed to world (Romans 12.2).

"It would be difficult to decide whether or not Lot was a truly saved man by reading his story in the Old Testament. He made no positive contribution to the life of faith. He chose the lower, the carnal, the worldly path. He left the fellowship of the faith at the earliest possible moment and was never restored to that fellowship. He made no mark for God. His family ended in disaster. The last we see of him in the narrative he is drunk and dishonored."

*"Indeed, were it not for a brief but remarkable statement of Peter written thousands of years later (2 Peter 2:7-8) we would be justified in concluding that the root of the matter had never been in him at all. Such is the life of a backslider. May God deliver us from a life like that." [1]*

Abraham was also faced with the same temptation. God had offered him everything if he would wait--and now the opportunity for a quick time of ease and pleasure was offered. Abraham said NO to the worldliness of Sodom. The only mark Abraham left of his life on earth were those altars!

- Abraham stayed a pilgrim for God in tents (Lot in Sodom);
- Abraham built altars every where he went (Lot built none);
- Abraham became a hero among all mankind (Lot ends ignominiously in incest);
- Abraham is called God's Friend 3 times (Lot fades out and his family all become God's enemies).

If we were to contrast Abraham and Lot it would sound like this:

<b>Lot--</b>	<b>Abraham--</b>
Was a competitor and opportunist (13.8)	Was a peacemaker
Took and grabbed (13.9)	Trusted God's Choice
Lived by the lust o his eyes (13:10-11)	Contented
Settled in a gay community (13:12-13)	Stayed a pilgrim and stranger for God
Lost His Kids (19:14)	Blessed His Children
Lost His Wife (19:26)	Kept his wife who became a mother of God's people
Defiled his daughters (19:36)	Blessed his children
Cursed His Descendents (19:38)	Blessed His Descendents
His descendents became God's enemies (19:37)	His descendents are God's chosen people
Lot's family line ended (19.38)	Abraham's family line will never end

Lot was conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2). All that he lived for went up in smoke and was buried under ruins somewhere in the area around the Dead Sea. Lot is a warning to all believers not to love the world, become friendly with the world, or be stained by the world (James 1:27), because the day of reckoning finally comes.

It is the care of stuff that Jesus said makes our hearts grow cold. It is when we are rich and increased with goods that we abandon the need to hold Christ's Hand—and we set off on our own.

### **Beware of the lust of the eyes!**

So is it possible to say no to lust? Yes. It is possible to have the force of temptations powers lessened as we mortify our flesh by starving our lusts. All of that comes by His grace.

Hymn #201 is a testimony that “Grace [is] Greater Than All Our Sin”. I want you to think about these words as we read them together.

*Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,*

*Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!*

*Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,*

*There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.*

*Sin and despair, like the sea waves cold,  
Threaten the soul with infinite loss;  
Grace that is greater, yes, grace untold,  
Points to the refuge, the mighty cross.*

*Dark is the stain that we cannot hide.  
What can avail to wash it away?  
Look! There is flowing a crimson tide,  
Brighter than snow you may be today.*

*Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,  
Freely bestowed on all who believe!  
You that are longing to see his face,  
Will you this moment his grace receive?*

*Refrain:*

*Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;  
Grace, grace, God's grace,*

*Grace that is greater than all our (MY) sin!*

“There are few warnings in Scripture more solemn than this. The Lord Jesus Christ says to us, "Remember Lot's wife."

It is a solemn warning, when we think of the person Jesus names. He does not bid us remember Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob, or Sarah, or Hannah, or Ruth. No: He singles out one whose soul was lost for ever. He cries to us, "Remember Lot's wife."

Remember Lot's wife (Luke 17.32). What doesn't God remember for us - intentionally left out of the record.

1. Her name, her family, her upbringing, her hobbies, her looks, her talents, her accomplishments...
2. No record of her parents, we won't answer for our parents.
3. No record of where she was from, we won't answer for our heritage.
4. No record of even her name, we won't answer for what is remembered about us.
5. No record of her family, we won't answer for our brothers and sisters.
6. No record of her marriage to Lot, we won't answer for whether we had a happy or sad marriage.
7. No record of her schooling, we won't answer for our academics.
8. No record of her athletic or artistic achievements, we won't answer for our talents.

What do we remember about Lot's wife? Only what the Lord does - and that is in God's Word.

She was in love with this world, so much so that when God tried to drag her out of the world and away from destruction she wrestled her hand free and turned back and looked with longing upon the city of doom and was joined with its destruction.

It is a solemn warning, when we consider the subject Jesus is upon. He is speaking of His own second coming to judge the world: He is describing the awful state of unreadiness in which many will be found. The last days are on His mind, when He says, "Remember Lot's wife."

It is a solemn warning, when we think of the Person who gives it. The Lord Jesus is full of love, mercy, and compassion: He is One who will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax. He could weep over unbelieving Jerusalem, and pray for the men that crucified Him; yet even He thinks it good to give this solemn warning and remind us of lost souls. Even He says, "Remember Lot's wife."

It is a solemn warning, when we think of the persons to whom it was first given. The Lord Jesus was speaking to His disciples: He was not addressing the Scribes and Pharisees who hated him, but Peter, James, and John, and many others who loved Him: yet even to them He thinks good to address a caution. Even to them He says, "Remember Lot's wife."

It is a solemn warning, when we consider the manner in which it was given. He does not merely say, "Beware of following-take heed of imitating-do not be like Lot's wife." He uses a different word: He says, "Remember" He speaks as if we were all in danger of forgetting the subject; He stirs up our lazy memories; He bids us keep the case before our minds. He cries, "Remember Lot's wife." [2]

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[1] John Phillips, Exploring Genesis, Moody Press, Chicago, 1980, p. 164.

[2] J. C. Ryle

# Flee the Lusts of the Flesh-Don't Befriend the World

COR: Message Twenty-Eight (051120AM)

Our God is jealous this morning. He loved us, bought us, found us, drew us, cleaned us and now lives within us by His Holy Spirit. Have you thought deeply about what it means to have a Jealous God living in you? Have you thought about what would offend someone who loved us so much that He wants us to be utterly loyal to Him?

So what could be the worst place we could find ourselves as believers this morning?

The answer comes in James, the very first New Testament letter written to Christ's Church—*it is getting drawn away from our loyalty to our God, acting like the world by cultivating its desires, and becoming God's enemy.*

How can a believer do such a thing? We become an enemy of God when we become friendly with the world.

Listen as James, our Lord's earthly brother, writes to believers and warns them of this dreadful condition he calls 'friendship with the world'. Open there with me to James 4.

- *James 4:1-8 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that **friendship with the world** is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "**The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously**"? 6 **But He gives more grace.** Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." 7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. NKJV*

Look closely at verse 4. The word **friendship** only appears here in the New Testament. It is a Greek word that describes love in the sense of a strong emotional attachment.

So think about the implications of this verse with me. God says beware of 'friendship' with the world. What is that?

The word **friend** is a word that means in our English language--**1:** one *attached to another by affection* or esteem **2:** one that is *not hostile toward us*, nor us toward them **3:** a *favored companion* **4:** one to whom we are *showing kindly interest and goodwill.*

So God says beware of friendship with the world. Using this definition of friendship examine what James has warned us about.

Are you attached to anything that God hates? Do you have affection for something that is utterly opposed to Him? Is the world of the Devil and all of its rebellion and lusts that is hostile towards God—looked upon affectionately by us?

Are God's enemies our favored companions? Do we show interest and good will towards what God hates?

### **We become friendly with the world *gradually*.**

Look at this progression that James points out—believers who are not careful: **1.** allow themselves to be drawn into “the friendship of the world” (James 4:4), **2.** which leads to getting “spotted” by the world (James 1:27) as they allow areas of their lives to pattern the current desires of the world. **3.** This friendship leads to loving the world (1 John 2:15-17), and this **4.** leads to increased conformity to the world (Rom. 12:2). And what is the tragic result? Believers like Lot last week and Samson this week get condemned with the world (1 Cor. 11:32) through severe chastening sometimes leading to even death but their souls saved “yet as by fire” (1 Cor. 3:11–15).

And what is friendship with the world again? Remember last week we saw that the Apostle John in I John 2.15-17 explains the world we are not to befriend or love is all the lusts and evil desires packaged in varied shapes, sizes, and colors...that always fall into one of three categories:

- **“Lust of flesh” We are tempted by our flesh to chase pleasures, this equals the cravings of the body.** *These are all of the sensual temptations.* This is lust for another person. The desire to have and enjoy the body of an individual, either mentally or physically, even though such pleasure is illegal and/or immoral. We can feed these lusts by going to places where we see uncovered bodies, or watching TV and movies that have various states of immodesty, or by seeking out images in magazines and online that feed these evil desires.
- **“Lust of the eyes” We are tempted by our eyes to chase stuff, this equals the lusting of the eyes.** *These are all of the material temptations.* This is lust for things. The things may be as large as a house or as small as a ring, as bright and dazzling as a new sports car or as dull and dusty as a two-hundred-year-old antique dresser. Lest we think that this is not as bad as the lusts of the flesh, remember that covetousness (insatiable longing for more things) is as damnable as idol worship. That means that the lust for possessions is as wicked as the lust for immorality. Beware of both, they are deadly!
- **“Pride of life” We are tempted by pride to chase status, this equals the boasting of the mouth.** *These are all of the personal temptation.* This is selfishness because I'm most important. This is irritableness because life revolves around me. This is untruthfulness because I need to protect myself. This is laziness because I want to rest and comfort myself. All of these are pride as well as obvious lust for status and special recognition. Pride also shows up as lust for the status of fame, fortune, power, or authority. Pride may also be wanting a title that makes heads turn, like “top executive” or “president” or “executive director” or even “doctor”. In the Scriptures this was Satan's sin. Pride in all its forms is heinous to God.

Any form of lust God hates. And so any form of lust we must flee and also hate. But look again at James 4.4. What happens when we are friendly to the world? God regards these pleasure-dominated believers adversarially, as verse 4 makes so clear with the reference to unfaithfulness, calling it spiritual adultery:

**“You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world **becomes an enemy of God.**”**

In the Old Testament, Israel was often called an adulteress for claiming to serve God while pursuing idols (e.g., Hos 1–3). So James says that believers *who claimed to be God’s friends but were really shared the world’s values* (3:13–18)—were really unfaithful to God—and **become God’s enemies**.

This is the most sobering thought of this entire passage. James has stated that a believer—one who has trusted in Christ alone for salvation, can become “an enemy of God”—God’s adversary. “This is horrifying! This requires some reverent and careful thought.

James is not saying friendship with people in the world is hatred toward God or makes anyone his adversary. Rather, friendship with the world—the kosmos, the evil world system which lies under the power of Satan—this friendship makes one God’s enemy (cf. John 14:30; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Galatians 1:4; 1 John 5:19).

Believers who choose to pursue the pleasures of the world are ineluctably drawn to friendship with the forces of the world-system, which are at the very least indifferent to God and at the worst openly hostile to him.

These friendships will ultimately spawn in the believer’s heart the same indifferences and hostilities, thereby turning a true Christian into a practical enemy of the God he claims and desires to love.

These are painful thoughts—that a Christian for whom Christ died when he was still an enemy (Romans 5:10) should in effect lower himself to live as a redeemed enemy of God! Yet this is the very focus of our text because James is writing to Christians. And it rings true to our Christian experience.

Many Christians, believers who have not disclaimed God or announced their allegiance to the world, derive their pleasures and entertainments in things which are patently hostile to God.

Their “friends” are the degraded videos and movies and CDs which demean the God they profess to love. There are also many who participate in evanescent pleasures God specifically forbids. Such become practical enemies by choice. “Anyone,” says James, “who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (v. 4b).

It must be said that those who persist in living as friends of the world are very likely without grace, not Christians, despite their claims to faith.

*Paul says of such, “For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things” (Philippians 3:18, 19). They are friends of the world! [1]*

Now look at James 4:5. Did you catch why God hates this world-friendly mode so much? It is because God loves us with a jealous love.

God compares friendship with the world to adultery. God says that we as believers are “married to Christ” (Rom. 7:4). We ought to be faithful to Christ as our husband.

The picture of “spiritual adultery” is a repeated theme in the warnings of the Old Testament Prophets Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Hosea (see Jer. 3:1–5; Ezek. 23; Hosea 1–2). God warned Israel that adopting the sinful ways of the other nations, and by worshiping their gods, they committed adultery against God. The world is God’s enemy. Those who want to be a friend of the world cannot be the friend of God. Our flesh and its evil desires is also God’s enemy. No believer who lives for the flesh can be God’s friend.

Understanding that the Holy Spirit’s jealousy for us as James states it—

*“opens a heart-changing truth to us: even when we sin by seeking our pleasures in friendship with the world, we are greatly loved, for jealousy is an essential element of true love.*

*We are brides of Christ, and the Holy Spirit does not want us to go somewhere else to “have our needs met.” The Holy Spirit’s true love for us evokes a proper intolerance of straying affection. The personalness of this ought to steel us against wandering. This jealous Spirit is inside us. When we sin, he is pained!*

*Furthermore, his jealousy is passionate, for the idea in the Greek is that he longs or yearns for us with an intense jealousy. To realize that the awesomely holy God who transcends the universe and is wholly other and self-contained is at the same time personally and passionately and lovingly jealous for our affection—this realization ought to stop any of our “affairs” with the world and cause us to prostrate our souls adoringly before him. How we are loved!”[2]*

And because we are so loved, God wants us to repent of any friendship with the world—so He warns us by showing us what will happen to us if we persist in this friendliness to the world mode.

Now that takes us to Samson. He is the classic picture of one who through the lusts of the flesh became a friend of the world.

Samson is one of the most powerful pictures I’ve ever seen of the futility and loss that friendship with the world brings. Samson gradually became a friend of the world and reaped in his lifetime the complete loss of everything he had lived his entire life to get.

Samson is a powerful reminder of God's grace. Though he descended into the depths of a lust filled life, wandering far from his calling and consecration – the Lord never let go of him. His soiled life is recorded. His defeats are unvarnished and clear for all to see. But against the backdrop of sin is the beauty of grace. God forgives, God restores, and God uses Samson one final time. That's the wonder of God's grace, the God of the second chance.

The life of Samson is recorded in God's Word as a picture of the destructive power of sin, and the restoring power of grace. Samson often lived in the lust of the flesh; Samson often walked by the lust of the eyes; Samson often responded with the pride of life. Yet Samson in the final analysis, as God sees His life – is a man of faith. What a picture of grace. One moment of godly sorrow, leading to a repentant prayer of faith -- at his darkest hour, God brought him back to the place of blessing. God is the God of the second chance.

*Marvelous grace of our loving God,*

*grace that exceeds our sin and our shame.*

*Yonder on Calvary's Mount outpoured—*

*There where the blood of the Lamb was spilled...*

I always like to say: If Samson made it – anyone may. He was about as low and as far and defiled as you can get and yet he made it and was one of God's dear heroes of the faith.

The life of Samson is a tragic story of the cost of yielding to the lusts of the flesh- and that's what I want to show you this evening as we start back in the book of Judges 13-16.

But before we go, let me just summarize the dangers of friendship with the world, the consequences of wandering from consecrated living, and the wonders of God's grace! All seen in the incredible life of Samson. If I was to distill his life down I would say this:

Samson is a powerful illustration of friendship with the world through the lusts of the flesh—and those destructive powers that the lusts of the flesh wield.

- Samson illustrates people who have power to conquer others, but who cannot conquer themselves.
- He could set the Philistine fields on fire, but was consumed by the fires of his own lust.
- He could kill an attacking lion, but was utterly defeated by the passions of his own flesh.
- He could easily break the bonds that men put on him, but the shackles of his own sin gradually grew stronger on his soul.
- He could have led the nation, he preferred to work independently, and as a result, left no permanent victory behind.
- He could have been remembered for what he built up, but instead everyone but God only remembers what he destroyed – lions, foxes, fields, gates, soldiers, women's purity, and his own life and ministry.

Samson is a powerful reminder of God's grace. Though he descended into the depths of a lust filled life, wandering far from his calling and consecration – the Lord never let go of him. His soiled life is recorded. His defeats are unvarnished and clear for all to see. But against the backdrop of sin is the beauty of grace. God forgives, God restores, and God uses Samson one final time.

- Sampson pictures the consequences of friendship with the world and the flesh. He is a graphic picture of loss.
- Experiencing great blessing and strength in one area of our lives does not make up for neglect and weakness in another area of our lives. Just because Samson had supernatural strength, had a Nazarite vow and the Spirit of God moved upon him- that was his strength—it didn't compensate for his overfed lust, anger and pride—he never restrained with repentance. Strength in one area doesn't compensate for weakness in another area. We must in the strength of the one area stand in the boldness and power of the Lord to put to death those sins of our flesh and to stand in the strength and to mortify the weakness. Samson never realized that.
- Knowing the presence of God does not automatically overwhelm our will. Samson knew God personally but did not choose to obey. We must choose to obey or we will disobey!
- God always uses men and women of faith in spite of their failures! What a lesson, what a blessing.

But what is the answer for all of us today who want to be God's friends and yet who still struggle with the lusts of this world around us? The answer is in James 4.

“But he gives more grace.” That is the answer—more grace!

This is not saving grace, for every believer has that. Rather, it is literally “greater grace”—God's gracious supply to live as we ought in a fallen world. As Augustine put it, “God gives what he demands.” There is always, for the believer, greater grace. This is without doubt one of the most comforting texts in all of Scripture.

This verse means there will always be enough grace regardless of our situation or need—always. The writer of Hebrews confidently tells us, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

We have no need which outstrips his grace, and we never will! Even if we fall into abject sin there is a stream of grace, as Paul said: “But where sin increased, grace increased all the more” (Romans 5:20b). “For daily need there is daily grace; for sudden need, sudden grace; for overwhelming need, overwhelming grace,” says John Blanchard. John Newton, author of “Amazing Grace,” knew this well:

*Through many dangers, toils and snares,*

*I have already come:*

*'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,*

*And grace will lead me home.*

Whatever our condition or situation, he always “gives us more grace.” He gives grace to overcome *personal weaknesses*. If to your alarm you find that you are repeatedly succumbing to a burning pursuit of pleasure, God will give you more grace if you ask.

If you are a victim of an imploding self-centeredness which repeatedly sucks you into its nothingness, and you want deliverance, there is grace for the asking.

Perhaps you are so stubborn that you have never lost an argument. Perhaps you are such a knothed that you never listen to anyone. Now you find that your most intimate relationships are impaired, so that your spouse and friends find your presence a burden, but you want to change. God will give you more grace.

If you have fed on cherished hatreds, but now see that the feast has really been the Devil’s feast and the main course your soul, and you want deliverance, he will give you more grace.

All we need to do is ask for it!

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[1] Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: James—Faith That Works*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

[2] Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: James—Faith That Works*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

# Flee the Lusts of the Flesh-Remember Samson

## COR: Message Twenty-Nine (051120PM)

Our God is jealous and He is Holy. The sins He hated in the Old Testament, He hates in the New Testament. What would offend someone who loved us so much that He wants us to be utterly loyal to Him? We become an enemy of God when we become friendly with the world. And what is friendship with the world again? As for the lusts of the flesh

- **"Lust of flesh" is being tempted by our flesh to chase pleasures, this equals the cravings of the body.** *These are all of the sensual temptations.* This is lust for another person. The desire to have and enjoy the body of an individual, either mentally or physically, even though such pleasure is illegal and/or immoral. We can feed these lusts by going to places where we see uncovered bodies, or watching TV and movies that have various states of immodesty, or by seeking out images in magazines and online that feed these evil desires.

But often we aren't aware that we are drifting into this dreadful place because we become friendly with the world *gradually*. *We forget to ask ourselves questions like--*

Am I emotionally attached to anything that God hates? Do I have affection for something that is utterly opposed to Him? Is the world of the Devil and all of its rebellion and lusts that is hostile towards God—looked upon with interest, for entertainment or even for pleasure? Are God's enemies my favored companions? Do I flee the lusts of the flesh or show interest and good will towards what God hates?

Now listen to the words of the Apostle of holy living, the most disciplined man of the First Century who wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else—as we turn to Ephesians 5.1-14.

- Ephesians 5:1-14 Follow God's example in everything you do just as a much loved child imitates his father. 2 Be full of love for others, following the example of Christ who loved you and gave himself to God as a sacrifice to take away your sins. And God was pleased, for Christ's love for you was like sweet perfume to him. 3 Let there be no sex sin, impurity or greed among you. Let no one be able to accuse you of any such things. 4 Dirty stories, foul talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, remind each other of God's goodness, and be thankful. 5 You can be sure of this: The Kingdom of Christ and of God will never belong to anyone who is impure or greedy, for a greedy person is really an idol worshiper—he loves and worships the good things of this life more than God. 6 Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the terrible wrath of God is upon all those who do them. 7 Don't even associate with such people. 8 For though once your heart was full of darkness, now it is full of light from the Lord, and your behavior should show it! 9 Because of this light within you, you should do only what is good and right and true. 10 Learn as you go along what pleases the Lord. 11 Take no part in the worthless pleasures of evil and darkness, but instead, rebuke and expose them. 12 It would be shameful even to mention here those pleasures of darkness that the

ungodly do. 13 But when you expose them, the light shines in upon their sin and shows it up, and when they see how wrong they really are, some of them may even become children of light! 14 That is why God says in the Scriptures, “Awake, O sleeper, and rise up from the dead; and Christ shall give you light.” TLB

The NIV captures verse three so clearly, look at those words again—“But among you **there must not be even a hint** of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.”

Now where have we gotten to in our American Culture? Are we listening to Paul or is our life slowly being squeezed into the shape our lusts of the flesh driven world around us pressures us to be every day?

Remember Romans 12.1-2—I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. NKJV

Before we get to Samson and all his failures with the lusts of the flesh, let's look at where we have gotten to in our world today. This is a magazine article I read over two years ago. This is just the first page—it was very convicting and distressing. It is very blunt and I hope that it will be enough to offend everyone of us into re-examining our lives to be sure we are not getting slowly squeezed into a place that we will embrace the lusts of the flesh and have our life become an enemy to God!

Suppose I said[1], “There’s a great-looking girl down the street. Let’s go look through her window and watch her undress, then pose for us naked, from the waist up. Then this girl and her boyfriend will get in a car and have sex - let’s listen and watch the windows steam up!”

You’d be shocked. You’d think what a pervert!

But suppose instead I said, “Hey, come on over. Let’s watch **Titanic**.”

Christians recommend this movie, church youth groups view it together, and many have shown it in their homes. Yet the movie contains precisely the scenes I described.

So, as our young men lust after bare women on the screen, our young women are trained in how to get a man’s attention.

**How does something shocking and shameful somehow become acceptable because we watch it through a television instead of a window?**

In terms of the lasting effects on our minds and morals, what’s the difference?

Yet many think, **Titanic**? Wonderful! It wasn’t even rated R!

Every day Christians across the country, including many church leaders, watch people undress through the window of television. We peek on people committing fornication and adultery, which our God calls an abomination.

We've become voyeurs, Peeping Toms, entertained by sin.

## Normalizing Evil

The enemy's strategy is to normalize evil. Consider young people struggling with homosexual temptation. How does it affect them when they watch popular television dramas where homosexual partners live together in apparent normality?

Parents who wouldn't dream of letting a dirty-minded adult baby-sit their children do it every time they let their kids surf the channels. Not only we, but our children become desensitized to immorality. Why are we surprised when our son gets a girl pregnant if we've allowed him to watch hundreds of immoral acts and hear thousands of jokes with sexual innuendos?

But it's just one little sex scene.

Suppose I offered you a cookie, saying, "A few mouse droppings fell in the batter, but for the most part it's a great cookie—you won't even notice."

**"To fear the LORD is to hate evil"** (Proverbs 8:13). When we're being entertained by evil, how can we hate it? How can we be pure when we amuse ourselves with impurity?

God warns us not to talk about sex inappropriately:

- *"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity... because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place" (Ephesians 5:3-4).*

How do our favorite dramas and sitcoms stand up to these verses?

How about **Seinfeld** and other nightly reruns? Do they contain "even a hint of sexual immorality" or "coarse joking"?

If we can listen to late night comedians' monologues riddled with immoral references, are we really fearing God and hating evil?

Because we are so loved, God wants us to repent of any friendship with the world—so He warns us by showing us what will happen to us if we persist in this friendliness to the world mode.

Now that takes us to Samson. He is the classic picture of one who through the lusts of the flesh became a friend of the world.

The life of Samson is a tragic story of the cost of yielding to the lusts of the flesh- and that's what I want to show you this evening as we start back in the book of Judges 13-16.

His life is recorded in God's Word as a picture of the destructive power of sin. Samson often lived in the lust of the flesh; Samson often walked by the lust of the eyes; Samson often responded with the pride of life.

The greatest enemy Samson had was himself. What a warning to each of us who have the same problem—it is called our flesh. Within each of us a traitorous inclination against God never slumbers, and always smolders. Given any amount of fuel either through the desires of the body, the desires of the eye or the pride of life—and it blazes to life in a conflagration of destruction.

Samson's history is an illustration of Paul's warning in 1 Cor. 9:27: But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Samson was disqualified. In Heaven he was remembered as a man of faith. On earth he was remembered as a man who was disqualified. Hebrews 11:32 cites him for his faith in God's Word, but apart from this, very little can be said on his behalf. "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12, NKJV) Note the steps that led to Samson's sin and tragic end.

To have grown up with Samson must have been amazing. His neighborhood pals must have stood in wonder at his immense strength. His enemies must have fled quickly. It was like having a one-man army.

As a young man probably in his teens, we get the first indicator that Samson was not going the direction the Lord had pointed him. He was in great need of God's grace. He begins to live by his desires and not God's. He begins to serve his own lusts and not God's Words. A string of women begin to parade through his life. In fact **seven times** Samson is guided by the lust of his eyes when he sees women that please him. That was a dangerous choice each time. Here is the list: Judges 14.1, 2, 3, 7; 15.1, 2; 16.1.

The final, and deadliest woman is Delilah in Judges 16.4. Her name has become synonymous with lust, deceit, betrayal and ruin. She tries to find the secret of his strength for an enormous bribe. She finally wears him down. Samson knows it is his hair and in a series of three lies he slowly gives clues.

C. H. Spurgeon's summary says it all:

*"At last[2] he falls into the hands of Delilah. He foolishly plays with his own destruction. At last he lets out the secret, his strength lay in his locks. Not that his hair made him strong; but that his hair was the symbol of his consecration, and was the pledge of God's favor to him.*

*While his hair was untouched he was a consecrated man; as soon as that was cut away, he was no longer perfectly consecrated, and then his strength departed from him. His hair is cut away;*

*the Philistines begin to oppress him, and his eyes are burned out with hot iron. How are the mighty fallen!*

*And now he comes to the very city out of which he had walked in all his pride with the gates and bolts upon his shoulders; and the little children come out, the lower orders of the people come round about him, and point at him - "Samson, the great hero, hath fallen! Let us make sport of him!" What a spectacle!*

*Why, he must be the sport and jest of every passer by, and of every fool who shall step in to see this great wonder - the destroyer of the Philistines made to toil at the mill.*

*That he should have lost his eyes was terrible; that he should have lost his strength was worse; but that he should have lost the favor of God for a while; that he should become the sport of God's enemies, was the worst of all."*

Samson's soiled life is recorded. His defeats are unvarnished and clear for all to see. Practicing of sin blinds us, then sin slowly binds us with its fetters and finally blinded and bound we have to go grinding through life because of sin. Talk to anybody that's lived an immoral life that's come to Christ, and ask them how exciting it really was.

Talk to someone that's been in the drug culture that's come to Christ- ask them whether it's as exciting as it appears to be in the media. Talk to anybody that's gotten into the world of alcohol, bars and ask them whether it really satisfies. It doesn't- it has a passing pleasure that slowly blinds- that binds us with cords that we forge for ourselves that we cannot break and finally we become the one who is grinding out an existence totally the captive of sin. God forgives, God restores, and God uses Samson one final time.

### **What was Samson's problem?**

1. First, Samson[3] was **dominated by lust**. That passion led Samson to desire a Philistine woman as a wife, which was strictly forbidden by God's Law. In addition, that passion led him to liaisons with prostitutes, like the one with the woman Delilah who betrayed him for money. How many times do men say no, no, I'm doing that because I love her. No- love can wait to fulfill a legitimate desire, lust can't. Lust always fulfills legitimate desires in an illegitimate way. You want to know the difference between love and lust? Can you wait? If you can't, it's lust. Love always waits.
2. Second, Samson was **driven by pride and revenge**. He was more moved by anger at personal affronts to strike out at the Philistines than he was moved by the suffering of the people he was supposed to lead (cf. 14:19–20; 15:7–8; 16:28).
3. Third, Samson was **defeated by himself**. We can hardly imagine what Samson, with his great strength and godly heritage, might have been. If only he had lived out daily the formal commitment to God expressed in that Nazarite vow.

The rest of the story shows the tragic end of the believer who will not let God have his way with his life. From 16:20 on, Samson does nothing but lose. What exactly did Samson lose?

1. ***Samson loses his hair***, the symbol of his Nazarite dedication; for that dedication had long since been abandoned. God allowed the outward symbol of it to be taken away from him.
2. ***Samson loses his strength***, but doesn't even know it until he is overpowered. Judges 16:20 And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" So he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!" **But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him.** He did not know how futile it is for the servant of God to try to serve the Lord when out of His will because he loses his strength. Be not deceived, God is not mocked. We operate in our own strength, he will let us fail in our own strength. We operate without heeding His warnings, He will let us live without heeding his warnings. We operate without walking in the Spirit? He'll let us operate that way.
3. ***Samson loses his sight***, as the Philistines put out his eyes.
4. ***Samson loses his freedom***, for they bind him with fetters of brass.
5. ***Samson loses his usefulness to the Lord***, for he ends up grinding corn instead of fighting God's battles. What a picture of sin. 1<sup>st</sup> sin blinds, then sin binds, and finally sin grinds. Ask any person who has lived a life of alcohol, a life of immorality, a life of drugs – they will tell you no matter how alluring it looks, it grinds—as the writer of Proverbs says it's gravel in the mouth. And all of this began when Samson despised his blessings and defied his parents!
6. ***Samson loses his testimony***, for he was the laughingstock of the Philistines. Their fish-god Dagon, not the God of Israel, was given all the glory.
7. ***Samson loses his life***. Samson was a castaway he had committed sin unto death, and God had to take him off the scene. His loved ones claimed his body and buried him "between Zorah and Eshtaol"—the very place where he had started his ministry (13:25). What about Samson's death? Was it suicide, and was it wrong[4]?

Turn to 1 Corinthians 9 These are some of the warning verses of the New Testament. You might want to mark them. The scriptures tell us that we should ponder the example of the Old Testament. What about us in the New Testament? You say we're not Nazarites and we get our hair cut and we don't stay away from the fruit of the vine and from being near dead people and all that. We aren't in the Old Testament. What's the message for us?

- 1 Corinthians 9:27 But **I discipline my body and bring it into subjection**, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should **become disqualified---**

Disqualified is *adokimos* in Greek, and it is a very interesting word. It's the word in the ancient world that was used in coin making. Individual men would melt gold and pour it into molds and they would stamp it with a number and they would give it out as currency and they agreed on how much it weighed.

But people learned early on that you could file off part of that gold coin and if you filed a little bit off of a lot of coins you could get coins with out working. So if you found coins with file

marks on them- they would be *adokimos*- they'd give them back and say I'm not taking that coin, its not right, someone has shaved off the edges, cut the corners, and ruined its worth!

What Paul is saying is, after I've lived my life and poured my life into the mold of God's will--if I cut corners and say I'm serving God so I can also serve my lust a little bit- I can have a little secret- you know life's hard and you got to have a few pleasures...

No says Paul, I'll not cheat in the holiness department or in the judgment God will say that one cut the corners, we'll disqualify that life. That's what Paul was afraid of. What's the message for us? 1 Corinthians 3 and the fires of God's Judgment burning away worthlessness from our lives is something to meditate on.

What happened to Samson in New Testament terms? To answer that, and as a warning to every one of us called to life long consecration to the Lord, here is a series of verses that explain to us that there are "sins unto death". As believers we are--

1. CONSECRATED -- ALL NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVERS ARE CONSECRATED TO THE LORD LIKE SAMSON WAS.

- 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, -wow- If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.
- 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Or do you not know that **your body is the temple (*naos* the sacred chamber where God dwelt) of the Holy Spirit** who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Don't shave off the corners, don't excuse, don't justify, and don't allow sin in because God says you and I are to be consecrated.

2. ANSWERABLE -- WE WILL ANSWER TO GOD FOR WHAT WE DID WITH OUR BODY.

- 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, **he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.**

That's why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:27 But **I discipline my body** (hupopiazō- GK.) This means hit under the eye- Paul says I am hitting myself under the eye- not literally- he wasn't some kind of nut that was trying to hurt his body and be a self sacrificing person physically- he's saying I'm trying to knock out my flesh **and bring it into subjection**, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should **become disqualified---** or have cut corners.

3. OWNED--GOD IS INVOLVED -- GOD WILL NOT STAND BY AS WE SIN. We will answer to God for what we did in our body because we as believers are consecrated to God.
  - 1 Corinthians 11:30-31 For this reason **many are weak –those are people who couldn't control their appetites- God sent weakness in to their lives- and sick among you, and many sleep.** For this reason **many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.** 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged (by God).

What is sleep? Death of the body- and the spirit is with Christ. People get weak, sick and die not because they're at that age when it's time for it to happen and it's a glorious going home- it's because they do not deal with their pride, lust and they live for the flesh. That's exactly what he's saying- meditate on that some time.

4. LIABLE--GOD GIVE US WARNINGS -- CHASTENING PROVES GOD'S LOVE.

- Hebrews 12:5-6 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 **For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.**"

Those who live by the lusts of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life- those who will not separate from the world, those who love the world, who make friends with the world, those who walk in the counsel of the ungodly, stand in the path of sinners, and sit in the seat of the scornful; (Psalm 1:1) God says don't be deceived I'm not mocked- you'll reap what you're sowing.

- Hebrews 12:7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

You say well I'm living it up and doing what I want and nothing is happening. Verse 8 should speak to you then-

- Hebrews 12:8 But if you are without chastening, of which all –by the way all always means all- all the time in the Bible- have become partakers, **then you are illegitimate and not sons.**

God says every single one of my sons and daughters I spank if they live in sin. God's warning us.

5. RESPONSIBLE--YOU CAN GO TOO FAR -- GOING TOO FAR TOO OFTEN WITH SIN WILL BE DEADLY FOR BELIEVERS.

- 1 John 5:16-17 If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. **There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.** 17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.

You see what all that unusual language means is this: if you go too far, too long, God says that's enough and takes you out of the world. Do you know what happened to Samson? He went too far, too long and God took him out. He sinned unto death. It's a tragic thing.

6. **WARNED--GOD KILLS BELIEVERS WHO WON'T REPENT IN TIME.** Revelation 2:22-23 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, **unless they repent of their deeds. 23 I will kill her children with death,** -God has a time period and He waits, chastens, weakens, sickens and when that does not bring about Godly sorrow that leads to repentance then God kills believers who will not repent- and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

Apparently during the grinding at the mill, Samson repented of his sin. Sightless, being made fun of- they made him trip over things, they hit him and all that and he was grinding in the mill and they had made him their center attraction- like an amusement park- but while that was going on- God offered him one more chance to act by faith. His hair had begun to grow and Samson remembered his calling. He asked God for strength to win one more victory over the enemy. God answered his prayer, but in defeating others, Samson lost his own life.

Samson is a powerful illustration of friendship with the world through the lusts of the flesh—and those destructive powers that the lusts of the flesh wield.

- Samson illustrates people who have power to conquer others, but who cannot conquer themselves.
- He could set the Philistine fields on fire, but was consumed by the fires of his own lust.
- He could kill an attacking lion, but was utterly defeated by the passions of his own flesh.
- He could easily break the bonds that men put on him, but the shackles of his own sin gradually grew stronger on his soul.
- He could have led the Nation, he preferred to work independently, and as a result, left no permanent victory behind.
- He could have been remembered for what he built up, but instead everyone but God only remembers what he destroyed – lions, foxes, fields, gates, soldiers, women's purity, and his own life and ministry.

Samson is a powerful reminder of God's grace. Though he descended into the depths of a lust filled life, wandering far from his calling and consecration – the Lord never let go of him. His soiled life is recorded. His defeats are unvarnished and clear for all to see. But against the backdrop of sin is the beauty of grace. God forgives, God restores, and God uses Samson one final time.

The life of Samson is recorded in God's Word as a picture of the destructive power of sin, and the restoring power of grace. Samson often lived in the lust of the flesh; Samson often walked by the lust of the eyes; Samson often responded with the pride of life. Yet Samson in the final analysis, as God sees His life – is a man of faith. One moment of godly sorrow, leading to a repentant prayer of faith -- at his darkest hour, brought him back to the place of blessing. Marvelous grace of our loving God, grace that exceeds our sin and our shame.

God's grace tells us that even if we have lived like Samson- Samson made it- to testify—anyone can who will turn in faith and repent and look to God. As a lost person, turn while you hear His voice. As a believer, there is no one who has gone too far to miss God's grace if you'll respond while you hear His voice. But if you continue, you can go too far and there is a sin that leads to death. Samson- what a picture of sin that destroys and grace that restores and our God who give us a second chance. Let's bow together and ask the Lord to speak to our hearts according to what His Spirit has laid upon us.

**4:7–10** In a series of 10 commands (10 imperative verbs in the Gr. text),

**4:7 submit.** Lit. “to line up under.” The word was used of soldiers under the authority of their commander. In the NT, it describes Jesus' submission to His parents' authority (Luke 2:51), submission to human government (Rom. 13:1), the church's submission to Christ (Eph. 5:24), and servants' submission to their masters (Titus 2:9; 1 Pet. 2:18). James used the word to describe a willing, conscious submission to God's authority as sovereign ruler of the universe. A truly humble person will give his allegiance to God, obey His commands, and follow His leadership (cf. Matt. 10:38). **Resist the devil and he will flee from you.** The flip side of the first command. “Resist” literally means “take your stand against.” All people are either under the lordship of Christ or the lordship of Satan (John 8:44; Eph. 2:2; 1 John 3:8; 5:19); there is no middle ground. Those who transfer their allegiance from Satan to God will find that Satan “will flee from” them; he is a defeated foe.

**4:8 Draw near.** Pursue an intimate love relationship with God (cf. Phil. 3:10). Salvation involves more than submitting to God and resisting the devil; the redeemed heart longs for communion with God (Pss. 27:8; 42:1,2; 63:1,2; 84:2; 143:6; Matt. 22:37). **Cleanse your hands.** The OT priests had to ceremonially wash their hands before approaching God (Ex. 30:19–21), and sinners who would approach Him must recognize and confess their sin. **Purify your hearts.** Cleansing the hands symbolizes external behavior; this phrase refers to the inner thoughts, motives, and desires of the heart (Ps. 24:3,4; Jer. 4:4; Ezek. 18:31; 36:25,26; 1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Pet. 1:22). **double-minded.** See note on 1:8. **4:9 Lament.** Be afflicted, wretched, and miserable. This is the state of those truly broken over their sin. **mourn.** See note on Matt. 5:4. God will not turn away a heart broken and contrite over sin (Ps. 51:17; 2 Cor. 7:10). Mourning is the inner response to such brokenness. **weep.** The outward manifestation of inner sorrow over sin (cf. Mark 14:72). **laughter.** Used only here in the NT, the word signifies the flippant laughter of those foolishly indulging in worldly pleasures. The picture is of people who give no thought to God, life, death, sin, judgment, or holiness. James calls on such people to mourn over their sin (cf. Luke 18:13,14). **4:10** See Ps. 75:6; Matt. 23:12. This final command sums up the preceding 9 (see notes on vv. 7–10) commands, which mark the truly humble person. “Humble” comes from a word meaning “to make oneself low.” Those conscious of being in the presence of the majestic, infinitely holy God are humble (cf. Is. 6:5).[5]

### **Friends of God and Enemies of the World—Three Instructions to Follow**

How can we be the friends of God and the enemies of the world, the flesh, and the devil? James gives us three instructions to follow if we would enjoy peace instead of war.

1. **Submit to God (v. 7).** This word is a military term that means “get into your proper rank.” Unconditional surrender is the only way to complete victory. If there is any area of the life kept back from God, there will always be battles. This explains why uncommitted Christians cannot live with themselves or with other people. “Neither give place to the devil,” cautions Paul in Ephesians 4:27. Satan needs a foothold in our lives if he is going to fight against God; and *we give him that foothold*. The way to resist the devil is to submit to God.

2. **Draw near to God (v. 8).** How do we do this? By confessing our sins and asking for His cleansing. “Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.” The Greek word translated *purify* means “make chaste.” This parallels the idea of “spiritual adultery” in James 4:4. Dr. A.W. Tozer has a profound essay in one of his books, entitled, “Nearness Is Likeness.” The more we are like God, the nearer we are to God. I may be sitting in my living room with my Siamese cat on my lap, and my wife may be twenty feet away in the kitchen; yet I am nearer to my wife than to the cat because the cat is unlike me. We have very little in common. God graciously draws near to us when we deal with the sin in our lives that keeps Him at a distance. He will not share us with anyone else; He must have complete control. The double-minded Christian can never be close to God. Again, Abraham and Lot come to mind. Abraham “drew near” and talked to God about Sodom (Gen. 18:23ff), while Lot moved into Sodom and lost the blessing of God.

3. **Humble yourselves before God (vv. 9–10).** It is possible to submit outwardly and yet not be humbled inwardly. God hates the sin of pride (Prov. 6:16–17), and He will chasten the proud believer until he is humbled. We have a tendency to treat sin too lightly, even to laugh about it (“let your laughter be turned into mourning”). But sin is serious, and one mark of true humility is facing the seriousness of sin and dealing with our disobedience. “A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise” (Ps. 51:17).

If we obey these three instructions, then God will draw near, cleanse us, and forgive us; *and the wars will cease!* We will not be at war with God, so we will not be at war with ourselves. This means we will not be at war with others. “And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever” (Isa. 32:17). [6]

#### THE GRACE OF GOD (v. 6)

The answer is to remove the question mark from the middle of verse 6 and put it at the end of verse 5 where it belongs, and then read the opening words of verse 6 not as a question, but as a declaration: “But he gives more grace.” That is the answer—more grace! This is not saving grace, for every believer has that. Rather, it is literally “greater grace”—God’s gracious supply to live as we ought in a fallen world. As Augustine put it, “God gives what he demands.” There is always, for the believer, greater grace. This is without doubt one of the most comforting texts in all of Scripture.

This verse means there will always be enough grace regardless of our situation or need—always. The writer of Hebrews confidently tells us, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). We have no need which outstrips his grace, and we never will! Even if we fall

into abject sin there is a stream of grace, as Paul said: “But where sin increased, grace increased all the more” (Romans 5:20b). “For daily need there is daily grace; for sudden need, sudden grace; for overwhelming need, overwhelming grace,” says John Blanchard. John Newton, author of “Amazing Grace,” knew this well:

*Through many dangers, toils and snares,*

*I have already come:*

*'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,*

*And grace will lead me home.*

There is always more grace. An artist once submitted a painting of Niagara Falls for an exhibition, but neglected to give it a title. The gallery, faced with the need to supply one, came up with these words: “more to follow.” Old Niagara Falls, spilling over billions of gallons per year for thousands of years, has more than met the needs of those below and is a fit emblem of the flood of God’s grace. There is always more to follow! The Apostle John referred to this reality, saying, “For of His fulness we have all received, and grace upon grace” (John 1:16, NASB). This is literally “grace instead of grace” or, as others have rendered it, “grace following grace” or “grace heaped upon grace.”

*He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater;*

*He sendeth more grace when the labours increase;*

*To added afflictions He addeth His mercy,*

*To multiplied trials His multiplied peace.*

*When we have exhausted our store of endurance,*

*When our strength has failed ere the day is half done:*

*When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,*

*Our Father’s full giving is only begun.*

*His love has no limits, His grace has no measure,*

*His power has no boundary known unto men;*

*For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,*

*He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.*

(Annie Johnson Flint)

Whatever our condition or situation, he always “gives us more grace.” He gives grace to overcome *personal weaknesses*. If to your alarm you find that you are repeatedly succumbing to a burning pursuit of hedonism, God will give you more grace if you ask. If you are a victim of an imploding self-centeredness which repeatedly sucks you into its nothingness, and you want deliverance, there is grace for the asking. Perhaps you are so stubborn that you have never lost an argument. Perhaps you are such a knothed that you never listen to anyone. Now you find that your most intimate relationships are impaired, so that your spouse and friends find your presence a burden, but you want to change. God will give you more grace. If you have fed on cherished hatreds, but now see that the feast has really been the Devil’s feast and the main course your soul, and you want deliverance, he will give you more grace.

Perhaps your life has *insurmountable obstacles*. Perhaps a terminal disease. There is more grace. Or a loved one’s death. There is more grace. Or a shattering divorce. There is more grace. Or the bitter ashes of failure. There is more grace.

There is also grace to do the *impossible*. If God is calling you to sell all and go to the ends of the earth to share the gospel or to take up a social crusade—whatever he asks—there will always be more grace.

*For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,*

*He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.*

Is there any condition to receiving this river of grace? Yes—a very slight one for some people, a Donner Pass for others. James quotes Proverbs 3:34—“That is why Scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble’” (v. 6b). A proud life is hard to grace. That is why Jesus said, “But woe to you who are rich ... Woe to you who are well fed now ... Woe to you who laugh now ... Woe to you when all men speak well of you” (Luke 6:24–26). He knew that the rich, well-fed, laughing, those who are spoken well of, are naturally weighted with the relentless gravity of pride and thus find it difficult to open up to God’s love and mercy. It is true that “he gives us more grace,” that there is always greater grace, grace upon grace, grace heaped on grace. But it is also true that “‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble’” (v. 6). Have we provoked our Maker’s jealousy? If so, he will give us more grace. *Lord, we come humbly to you asking for more grace!*[7]

### ***RESIST ... COME NEAR (vv. 7b, 8a)***

“Resist” is a military metaphor which means to *stand against*, as in combat. This martial language suggests the parallel language of Ephesians 6 where we are told how to prepare to resist the Devil. The primary element is an understanding of the enemy, which Paul memorably gives us in verse 12: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” From this we learn that the struggle is *supernatural*, supra-flesh and blood. We also learn that it is *personal*, for the word for “struggle” suggests hand to hand combat—

swaying back and forth in sweaty battle. Finally, it is *futile* if fought with conventional weapons because we are fighting against serried ranks of evil angels led by fallen angelic princes. Once we understand the nature of the enemy, we must put on the proper armament. For this let us picture the old warrior Paul in his own spiritual armor.

1. He has worn his war belt so long that it is sweat through and salt-stained and comfortable like an old horse's bridle, and it holds everything perfectly in place. The "*belt of truth*," God's truth, has girt him tight for years, so that it permeates his life and truth reigns within. He is armed with the clear eyes of a clear conscience. He can face anything.

2. His torso is sheathed with a battle-tarnished breastplate. It is crisscrossed with great lateral grooves from slicing sword blows and dented from enemy artillery. The "*breastplate of righteousness*" has preserved his vitals intact. His holy life has rendered his heart impervious to the spiritual assaults of Satan.

3. His gnarled legs are comfortable in his ancient war boots. He has stood his ground on several continents. The boots are the "*gospel of peace*," the peace *with* God that comes through faith in him, and the resultant peace *of* God—the sense of well-being in wholeness—*shalom*. He stands in peace, and being rooted in peace he cannot be moved.

4. Paul's great shield terrifies the eyes, for the broken shafts and the many charred holes reveal him to be the victor of many fierce battles. He has held the "*shield of faith*" as he repeatedly believed God's Word and so extinguished every fiery dart of doubt and sensuality and materialism. None have touched him.

5. On his old gray head he wears a helmet which has seen better days. Great dents mar its symmetry, reminders of furtive blows dealt him by the enemy. The "*helmet of salvation*," the confidence of knowing that he is saved and will be saved, has allowed him to stand tall against the most vicious assaults. His imperial confidence gives him a regal bearing.

6. Then there is his sword. He was equal to a hundred when his sword flashed. The "*sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*," the ultimate offensive weapon, cut through everything—armor, flesh, glistening bone, and running marrow—even the soul (cf. Hebrews 4:12).

These are the weapons: *truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God*—and any believer who resists with these will put the Devil and his armies to flight! This is not arrogance. This is the truth! You and I can withstand the Devil if we wear the armor God provides. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (v. 7).

Such resources are available to us! But there is another half to this: "Come near to God and he will come near to you" (v. 8a). There are two views which the Christian ought to cultivate with all that he has: the Devil's back and the face of God.

The soul-tingling truth here is, if you go after God, he will go after you! This was the prodigal son's experience when he neared his home: "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him

and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). The father smothered him with kisses. Inch toward God, and he will step toward you. Step toward God, and he will sprint toward you. Sprint toward God, and he will fly to you!

What is James’ overall point here in this positive call to draw near? In a word, *prayer*. The essence of prayer is the heart drawing near to God. Prayer is the soul’s desire to come to him, to receive his love, to feel his power as we conform to his will. This is exactly what Paul’s soldier in spiritual armor does. Every piece is in place. The spiritual forces of wickedness approach, and there will be lethal battle. But first the soldier falls to his knees and prays in the Spirit with all kinds of prayers (cf. Ephesians 6:18).

There is only one view more welcome than the backside of the Devil—and that is the face of God. Paul tells us, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:13). As his children and *in his Son*, we are near. But there is a *nearer nearness* available to all: “Come near to God and he will come near to you.” If you will take that step, a new nearness to God will be yours, and with it buoying tides of his grace.

### ***WASH ... PURIFY (v. 8b)***

The external is, “Wash your hands, you sinners,” and the internal is, “purify your hearts, you double-minded” (v. 8b). This is a call to clean up one’s acts and inner life. James is bitingly aggressive, because up to now he has been courteously referring to his correspondents as “brethren,” but now insultingly calls them “sinners” and “double-minded.” The latter literally means *two-souled* and describes them as having a double allegiance to God and the world. This is a spiritual impossibility. Ridiculous! we think. But it is just as much (or even more) absurd for a true child of God to serve two masters. The Lord calls us to a single-minded allegiance to himself. He wants us to have eyes only for him! Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart (*the single-minded*), for they will see God” (Matthew 5:8). Jesus meant they would see him in this life, because this purity of focus invites deeper spiritual understanding. Seeing God in life is the highest good—the *summum bonum*—because all those who see him become like him. “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18). Are we two-souled Christians—having wandering eyes, one raised to Heaven, one focused on earth—absurd Mickey Cohens? If so, there is only one thing to do: *repent!* “Wash your hands ... purify your hearts”—and get ready for more grace!

### ***GRIEVE ... CHANGE (v. 9)***

Nevertheless, while gloom is not a Christian characteristic, mourning over our sin is. “Grieve” describes the wretchedness one ought to experience when he falls to sin. “Be devastated” is the perfect expression of what “grieve” means. “Mourn” expresses inner grief, and “wail” refers to a funeral lament. “Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom” is a scathing denunciation of Christians who are so insensitive and superficial that they are laughing when they ought to be weeping! Some laughter indicates a sickness of soul which only tears can cure. Have we wept over our sins? Years ago, at a great convention, Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse stood

before a vast throng and began his address dramatically by saying: “Up is down!” and then after a lengthy pause, “Down is up!” In doing so, he was intoning an unbreakable spiritual law: God exalts the humble and debases the proud. During his time on earth Jesus repeated this on three separate occasions: “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:14; cf. Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:11). The gravity of grace will always channel the rivers of divine favor to the lowly—to those 1) who submit to God, 2) whose soul’s momentum is away from the Devil and toward God, 3) who purify their inner and outer lives, 4) who mourn over their sins, and 5) who obey the final summary command, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” (v. 10). We are not to wait passively for this to somehow happen. We are not to wait for someone else to humble us, nor should we wait for the vicissitudes of life to do it. Rather, self-humbling is *our* Christian duty. We must take inventory of our sinfulness and weakness, then bow in total submission to God, yielding our total being, our dreams, our future, our *everything* to him. It is then that he will pour on the grace—grace upon grace—grace heaped upon grace—“and he will lift you up.”[8]

### **SAMSON (SAVE)**

Samson is one of the most powerful pictures I’ve ever seen of the futility and loss that friendship with the world brings. Samson gradually became a friend of the world and reaped in his lifetime the complete loss of everything he had lived his entire life to get.

Samson is a powerful reminder of God’s grace. Though he descended into the depths of a lust filled life, wandering far from his calling and consecration – the Lord never let go of him. His soiled life is recorded. His defeats are unvarnished and clear for all to see. But against the backdrop of sin is the beauty of grace. God forgives, God restores, and God uses Samson one final time. That’s the wonder of God’s grace, the God of the second chance.

The life of Samson is recorded in God’s Word as a picture of the destructive power of sin, and the restoring power of grace. Samson often lived in the lust of the flesh; Samson often walked by the lust of the eyes; Samson often responded with the pride of life. Yet Samson in the final analysis, as God sees His life – is a man of faith. What a picture of grace. One moment of godly sorrow, leading to a repentant prayer of faith -- at his darkest hour, God brought him back to the place of blessing. God is the God of the second chance.

*Marvelous grace of our loving God,*

*Grace that exceeds our sin and our shame.*

*Yonder on Calvary’s Mount outpoured—*

*There where the blood of the Lamb was spilled...*

I always like to say: If Samson made it – anyone may. He was about as low and as far and defiled as you can get and yet he made it and was one of God’s dear heroes of the faith.

All of this wonderful heritage of Judges 13, the grown Samson despised!

God said to never drink—he drank. God said to never touch—he touched. God said to never cut—he cut. Instead of putting himself in God’s hands to accomplish his God-given task, he chose to live to please himself. How tragic it is when God gives a young person a wonderful heritage and a great opportunity, and he or she treats it lightly. God says to whom much is given, much is required and there are children that grow up in the shadow of Godly parents, under the sound of God’s Word, with the knowledge of God and yet they choose to neglect that and worse than that they turn from it. God says there’s a great danger in turning from Him.

Let’s continue with Samson because in the first few verses of chapter 14 we see a problem.

**SAMSON DISOBEYED HIS PARENTS (14:1–4):** One evidence of spiritual decline can be the way we get along with our loved ones- especially his parents- he disobeyed them. What did he decide?

**He decided to go away from the Lord.** <sup>1</sup> Now Samson went down to Timnah, and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines. (14:1) Did you know that’s a little statement but it’s a profound statement. He chose to go down away from the Lord’s way. He was a Nazarite, he was to be not only separated from death and alcohol and from anything to do with disobedience. He was to be pure as the Lord’s servant and that meant marry only within the covenant people. Well Samson went down- it is true both spiritually and geographically. Instead of staying in the borders of Israel, he went into enemy territory and fell in love with a heathen woman.

**He decided to ignore God’s rules.** He knew the laws of separation God had given to the Jews, but he chose to ignore them- he chose to not only go to Timnah and look for one but he picked one- he didn’t just think through--- hey maybe there’s some pretty gals down the road here—no—he spied one and wanted one and chose one. He went away from the Lord, he looked in the wrong spot for what he wanted and then he chose to ignore God’s rules but look at this- in verse 3: And Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she pleases me well." Literally she is in my eyes. Did you know that’s what the Hebrew words are- for she is in my eyes. He says man I can’t get her off my mind I can see her all the time, she’s filling my mind. You know what that is? Total outward focus- he saw her body, he never saw her spirit, he never looked at her soul, he never thought of her character, he looked at her body and was living for the moment, for the lusts of his flesh and

What was in his eyes? Her character? Her devotion to God? No, it was her body, her looks, her allurements that kept her burned into his mind. (see Ex. 34:16; Deut. 7:3; and 2 Cor. 6:14–18; also Gen. 24:1–4).

**He decided he was his own authority.** That started when he chose to disobey his parents. When they said don’t do that Samson---- now God overruled because God, knowing his propensity, knowing his lust was going to use this as a vehicle of His judgment on the Philistines but Samson was still responsible—be not deceived, God is not mocked, what he sowed, he’s going to reap.

Note that he *told* his parents; he did not *ask* them. And when they reminded him of God’s law, he defied them. “Get her for me,” he insisted, “for she pleases me well!” It did not bother Samson

that his desires displeased his parents. Note that in this instance God mercifully was going to overrule his sin and use it to weaken the Philistines (v. 4). Christian young people need to stop and consider carefully when they find themselves defying godly parents who know God's Word.

But let's hasten to the tragedy of Samson's life in the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter because

**SAMSON PLAYED WITH SIN (16):** Samson had already gotten into trouble with one woman, but now he tried again, this time going deep into enemy territory to Gaza. Pride has taken hold of him, he is the superman so he can go marching right into the epicenter of the Philistine army going for another woman. And his lusts take him into the city of Gaza.

- Again, God warned him by allowing the enemy to almost catch him, but Samson still refused to repent. It was then that Delilah came into his life and led him to his doom.
- The Valley of Sorek was near his home, but Samson's heart was already far from God that he should know and love and serve. It shocks us to see this Nazarite sleeping on the lap of a wicked woman, but this is what happens when people choose to go their own way to play with sin and reject the counsel of loved ones and the Lord.
- Three times Delilah enticed Samson, and three times he lied to her. Each time, the enemy attacked him, so he should have realized he was in danger. But read Prov. 7:21–27 to see why Samson yielded. He was asleep when he should have been awake! Remember the warning Christ gave to Peter in Matt. 26:40–41. Note that each lie Samson told actually took him closer to the truth. How dangerous it is to play with sin.

Proverbs 7:21-27 With her enticing speech she caused him to yield, With her flattering lips she seduced him. 22 Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter,

Or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, 23 Till an arrow struck his liver. As a bird hastens to the snare, He did not know it would cost his life. 24 Now therefore, listen to me, my children; Pay attention to the words of my mouth: 25 Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, Do not stray into her paths; 26 For she has cast down many wounded, And all who were slain by her were strong men. 27 Her house is the way to hell, Descending to the chambers of death.

- Matthew 26:40-41 Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? 41 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

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[1] By Randy Alcorn, found online at: <http://afajournal.org/2003/september/903purity.asp>

[2] Delivered on Sabbath Morning, November 21st, 1858, by the REV. C. H. SPURGEON at the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens. Sermon # 224. <http://thebiblerevival.com/teachings/books/0008/0224.htm>

[3] Richards, Lawrence O., *The Teacher's Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1987.

[4] Some Philistine temples had roofs overlooking a courtyard, above wooden columns planted on stone foundations. The central pillars were set close to furnish extra support for the roof. Here the victory celebration and taunts flung at the prisoner below drew a big crowd. The full strength of Samson, renewed by God, enabled him to buckle the columns. As a result, the roof collapsed and the victory was Israel's, not Philistia's. He died for the cause of his country and his God. He was not committing suicide, but rather bringing God's judgment on His enemies and willing to leave his own life or death to God. He was the greatest champion of all Israel,

yet a man of passion capable of severe sin. Still, he is in the list of the faithful (cf. Heb. 11:32). Judges 16 in the John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Dallas: Word Publishing) 1997.

[5]John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Dallas: Word Publishing) 1997.

[6]Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

[7]Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: James—Faith That Works*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

[8]Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: James—Faith That Works*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.