

CHIEF

MINISTRIES

April 2015

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death" said the Psalmist, "I will fear no evil. For your rod and your staff they comfort me." (Psalms 23:4) Psalms 91 counsels us to *"Hide ourselves under the shadow of the Almighty"*, and in doing so make God the fortress of our security. Martin Luther, on reading these verses wrote the great hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God", a bulwark (fortified defensive wall) never failing.

How right Luther was. We don't have to go through life intimidated by fear. The indwelling Christ becomes our security, or as Psalms 23 says, our staff, our rod, our constant companion, our Great Shepherd! Our fears should dissolve in His nearness.

Often, however, in spite of the fortress of God, we can act superficially and with swelling "Bravado". Bravado is the act of telling ourselves we are not afraid when really we are scared to death. We are more a trembling fortress than a mighty one! This passage teaches us that courage is not the absence of terror. Courage is the ability to face our fears without blinking.

Three kinds of fear

There are different kinds of fear. First, there is the instant, a sudden or surprise sort of fear. *"Surely He will save you from the fowler's snare"* (Psalms 91:3). The Psalm calls our attention to the fowler that springs up without warning and closes around a poor bird. So in life we encounter these surprise fears for which we don't have enough time to plot an answer. Life turns on a dime. The grass covered lid gives way and we are immediately plunged into the pit. We are walking down a familiar street, the same street we walked for years. We turn a corner - the same corner we've turned many times - and the universe falls away, and our world is destroyed. Life sometimes surprises us with such devastating circumstances that we can never go back to living the same way we once did.

It's the shattering agony of the Humpty-Dumpty syndrome. We couldn't have suspected it. It happens without warning, and on a beautiful day when we thought we could see forever, we lie fragmented and broken. We are powerless to put the pieces of our lives back together.

But there is a second fear: The ongoing fear of the grind. All kinds of things make us afraid in life. Sometimes our greatest fears lie in the terms of the hassles of life. Can we cope?

I've heard some say, "True Christians never suffer from burnout". Don't believe it! Are Christians safe from the sudden crash of compounded calamities? Of course not! Sometimes situations come at us so fast that we are paralyzed before them. Of course we can burnout. But burnout is not our final state. Demons don't fight against us as long as we are doing our own will. For our own wills become the demons, and it is these which attack us in order that we may fulfill them. In all our doing are we really doing His will or our own will?

Catch the real metaphor in Psalms 23. In the dark Valley, the sheep move in close to his legs, touching him as they traverse those narrow chasms of darkness and doubt. They see in the shepherd's hand a crook and a rod. With the crook he touches them gently to guide them and lead them. With the rod he says to them, "there is nothing short of my own life that can threaten your life. I care for you. I love you. Trust me!" God does not set at liberty any fear to have its way with us.

The third fear is a kind of terror. The fear of the unknown. The fear of stepping out. The psalmist says, like an Eagle God stretches his wings over us and cares for us: "*He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge*" (Psalms 91:4). Only the word there really isn't feathers its pinions - the large first bones in the Eagle's wings that spread the feathers over the nestlings so nothing can hurt them.

God often operates in our lives just as we do with our own children. He often pushes us into some unknown place to make us trust and grow. The mother eagle must sometimes seem heartless. Upon some proper moment of maturity, she shoves her eaglets towards what they fear most: the edge of the nest. But is the Eagle really heartless? She knows that the natural fears of her little ones would leave them stuck, quivering forever in the dead sticks of their high nest. If they never faced their fears, they would become fat old Eagles who never knew the joy of thunderheads or the thrill of magenta sunsets. So her little ones must learn that the fall they so fear is but an illusion to be tamed. To be changed to flight, the cowardice only has to be overcome. Flight is the wings they give to terror. Are the eaglets' fears real? Yes. But they don't have to face them alone. Against such fear, the mother eagle spreads her pinions. Winter is coming. Ice will soon fall upon the aerie. But by then these little ones will know no fear. The parent has spread the wingspan of her devotion between their fragile lives and the storm.

In a similar way, the Good Shepherd says to us, "*I give you freedom from fear. You will not be afraid of the terror by night*". Never afraid? No! We have an intercessor! The Holy Spirit is in constant prayer for our security. No heart need fear while the Spirit remains at His unceasing prayer.

Have you ever known the terror by night? Have you ever been afraid of the dark? You're too big now, aren't you? But there may have been a day when you were afraid of the dark. Demons lurked in the flowers in the wallpaper or in the knots of the paneling. You were afraid to turn out the light, and then again, afraid to turn it on too quickly for fear of something hovering around you. God does not want us to have such fear. "*My truth shall be your shield*", He says "*My truth will be your fortress. I have a staff, I have a rod. Don't trust anything but my rod and staff.*" So trust we must. When the storms gather against us, we must trust: Do not be afraid of those trials that God may see fit to send upon you. It is with the wind and storm of tribulation that God separates the true wheat from the chaff.

We must be joined to our trials: Make friends with your trials as though you were always to live together, and you will see that when you ceased to take thought for your own deliverance, God will take thought for you. Only to the extent that we expose ourselves over and over to the annihilation can that which is indestructible be found in us. Learn to lean into the sharp points. If it hurts - lean in. Lean in until it loses its power over you. Sustain it with your heart open and still be loving. Blessed is any weight, however overwhelming, which God has been so good as to fasten with His own hand upon your shoulders. Gain healing from troubled waters like at the pool of Bethesda. Learn to be as the angel that stirred the water. He descended among the misery around him, yet never lost his heavenly purity for his perfect happiness.

Trouble and perplexity drive us to prayer and prayer drives away trouble and perplexity.

God takes a thousand more pains with us than an artist with his picture. By many touches of sorrow and by many colors of circumstances He would bring us into the form that is highest and noblest in His sight.

This is the way to live without fear. It is to rest under the shadow of the Almighty and to walk under the protection of His rod and staff. How far? He will walk with you forever.

In the valley of the shadow, the rod and staff do comfort. We are all to be covered with the Pinion's of His wings. We are each defended by His shield and buckler. We cannot suffer any wound too terminal to destroy our confidence. Neither the dragon nor the arsenal of hell can make us afraid.

Consider this business of being covered with the wings of the loving God as an Eagle covers her chicks.

When I was a boy, a friend had a farm that I'd visit. I remember looking out over the barnyard one time and saw an old mother hen strutting across the clearing, clucking proudly. Her little chicks trailed close behind her. My friend's brother challenged him, "I'll bet you can't hit that old hen with your air rifle". It was a brand-new air rifle. My friend had been shooting anything that stood still or moved. He cocked a BB into the chamber and aimed the small rifle at the old mother hen. He pulled the trigger and hit her in the neck. Her head fell slowly sideways. I watched her in fascination and double fear. The fear of an old hen in total disorientation about what life was and what it could mean: what sudden calamity had fallen from the sky? Then I saw the fear of her little ones, doing all they knew: running to their mother. Even as she was dying in an effort to protect them, she spread her wings as far as she could. And in her final moments, these little chicks ran under her wings to receive the last bit of warmth she could give them.

Now I understand the beauty of my Savior's commitment: *"I will cover you with my wings. Your freedom is my shield. You are delivered from fear! You trust in my integrity. Come and receive."* We call Jesus "Lord" and all of life becomes manageable - all our fears are dust in the presence of His power.

Don't let your current circumstances control your mood. Paul said in Philippians 4:11, *"I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."* Is your soul triumphant enough to say, "Christ is Lord over all my circumstances? This current moment of misery will not steal my joy."

Disappointment is not the fruit of humility but of pride. It's only when our gas bubble of confidence is pricked by our failure that we'll see if we truly are humble. Pride will set you up for a fall. Satan is defeated by the absence of pride.

After receiving a three-year set off, I learned quickly where I stood. I was right next to Jesus.

Stand with me men of God. Start believing that you were created to make a difference and move out in that anointing. Have No Fear!

.....*And lo, ...I am with you always even unto the end of the world (Matthew 28:20)*

I'm praying for you,

Chief

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