

## Chapter 7: Deliverance

How does one find *lasting* peace – the type of peace that Timothy referenced in the verse, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and of a sound mind” (II Timothy 1:7). How does one experience the peace that rises above troubled times and difficult circumstances? At the time of this writing COVID-19 has waged war on our planet. Over two hundred countries have confirmed cases. To date there are 74,481 reported deaths in the United States and 264,189 deaths world-wide as a result of this evil pandemic. On that rare outing when I shop for necessities, I carefully observe interactions. Leaving a margin between myself and others, store employees and patrons rarely speak or make eye contact. There is a heightened level of suspicion – a concern that any one of us could be carriers of the virus. I sense the spirit of fear.

When the Apostle Paul admonished Christians to get suited for spiritual warfare, he wrote “*above all* take up the shield of faith from which you will be able to quench the fiery darts of the evil one (Ephesians 6:16). I believe our truest long-term enemy is not the coronavirus. The real enemy is the unseen spirit of fear. If allowed to take hold, the spirit of fear will manifest itself in isolation and disconnection between people, phobias in various forms, control of others, superstitions, suspicions, and dread about the future. Yet, God is the God of *all* comfort. There is an answer.

What is normal to our experience may in fact not be healthy or normal at all – it is merely familiar. For many years one of the first emotions I experienced in the morning upon

waking was dread. Dread of the long list that awaited me. Dread of the decisions that I would be required to make in various leadership roles. Dread of the uncertainty of the day ahead. Several months ago, I decided to tackle this emotion head-on. I got on my knees, confessed partnering with the sin of worry, acknowledged my need for God, and *commanded* the spirit of fear to leave by the authority given to me as a child of the Heavenly Father – through faith in the Name of Jesus, by the shed blood of Jesus, and through the authority of Jesus. Following the command, I asked the Lord to send peace through the gift of the Holy Spirit to take its place.

I have not experienced the spirit of fear or the emotion of dread since that day. Several weeks after that prayer the coronavirus took hold. Despite the closing of the family business for over a month I experienced a “peace that passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). My mother passed to be with Jesus since the time of the prayer. Even so, I experienced a supernatural peace. I am more relaxed – anxious striving has ceased. I do what the Lord asks me to do and when He asks me to do it. When weary, I cease my labors. I cannot remember a time in my life when I have experienced such *lasting* peace.

Like me, do you desire the comfort of God? God desires to comfort His children, but he waits until we are ready. He meets us at the point when we recognize our need for Him and are willing to do battle against the enemy. “This kind can only come out with prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21). There is an unseen spirit realm that wars against this world – seeking to destroy and kill (1 Peter 5:8). Those who have placed personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ have been given the tools for victory in faith to claim the presence and virtues of Christ:

1. **The blood of Jesus** “They triumphed over him (the enemy) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony...” (Revelation 12:11a)
2. **The Name of Jesus** “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!”  
At that moment the spirit left her” (Acts 16:18b)
3. **The Authority of Jesus (Word)** “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  
” (Hebrews 4:12). “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...” (John 1:1).

For those who experience the mental torment of an unclean spirit – whether it be fear, pride, anger, envy, or any other - the “peace that passes all understanding” is possible. One must command the evil presence to leave through the authority that is ours in Christ Jesus.

The mind is the battlefield. Emotions are merely a fruit of the root – the root being our thoughts or belief system. Biblical writers, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have admonished – even commanded! – not to worry. “Be anxious *for nothing*, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). “Thou wilt keep him in *perfect peace*, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusts in thee” (Isaiah 26:3). The writer to the church at Philippi encouraged the believers to set their minds on that which is good, pure, excellent, praiseworthy, and true -

think on these things (Philippians 4:8). In fact, we are told to rejoice in the Lord *always* (Philippians 4:4). To rejoice in the Lord *always* leaves no entry point, foothold, or agreement with the evil one through his lies, creating unrest in our minds. It is through worry – an agreement with the enemy’s lies – that we open our minds to the oppressive and tormenting unclean spirit realm. God’s comfort and peace is a result of setting our minds on His character and truths, leaving no room for the evil one to take residence.

In nearly all books from Matthew through Revelation there is a verse having to do with God’s peace and an admonition not to worry. Loved one, think on these things:

**Matthew 6:34** “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble **of its own.**”

**Mark 5:36** “Jesus told him, ‘**Do not be afraid**; just believe.’”

**Luke 12:22-26** “**Do not worry** about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, **why do you worry** about the rest?”

**John 14:27** “**Peace** is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does. **Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid.**”

**Acts 9:31** “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria **had peace** and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the **comfort of the Holy Spirit**, they were multiplied.”

**Romans 8:38-39** “And I am convinced that **nothing can ever separate us from God’s love**. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, **neither our fears for today nor our worries** about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love.”

**II Corinthians 1:3-7** “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and **God of all comfort**, who **comforts** us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to **comfort** those who are in any trouble, with the **comfort** with which we ourselves are **comforted by God**. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our **consolation** also abounds through Christ.”

**Galatians 5:22** “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, **peace**, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”

**Ephesians 2:14** “For He Himself is **our peace**...”

**Philippians 4:6-7** “**Do not be anxious** about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And **the peace of God**, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

**Colossians 3:15** “And let the **peace of God rule in your hearts**, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.”

**I Thessalonians 5:11** “Therefore **comfort each other** and edify one another, just as you are also doing.”

**II Thessalonians 3:16a** “Now may the **Lord of peace** Himself **give you peace** always in every way.”

**II Timothy 1:7** “**For God has not given us a spirit of fear**, but of power and love and of a sound mind.”

**Hebrews 13:5 – 6** “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.**” So we may boldly say: “The Lord is my helper; **I will not fear.** What can man do to me?”

**1 Peter 5:6-7** “Humble yourselves, then, under God’s mighty hand, so that he will lift you up in His good time. **Leave all your worries with him** because he cares for you.”

**1 John 4:18a** “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear...”

**Revelation 1:17** “Then he placed his right hand on me and said: ‘**Do not be afraid.** I am the First and the Last.’”

God has given us additional passages of comfort from the book of Psalms:

**Psalms 56:3** “**When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.**”

**Psalms 94:19** “When anxiety was great within me, **your consolation brought joy** to my soul.”

**Psalms 23:4** “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, **I will fear no evil**, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they **comfort me.**”

**Psalms 27:1** “The Lord is my light and my salvation—**whom shall I fear?** The Lord is the stronghold of my life—**of whom shall I be afraid?**”

**Psalm 55:22** “Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.”

**Psalm 46:1** “God is our refuge and strength, an **ever-present help in trouble.**”

**Psalm 118:6-7** “The Lord is with me; **I will not be afraid.** What can man do to me? The Lord is with me; he is my helper.”

**Psalm 34:7** “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and **he delivers them.**”

**Psalm 34:4** “I prayed to the Lord, and he answered me. **He freed me from all my fears.**”

**Psalm 91:1-16** “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”...He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. **You will not fear the terror of night,** nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you...**For he will command his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways...**“Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; **I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him** and honor him...”

And more beautiful verses of comfort from the Old Testament:

**Isaiah 43:1** “But now, this is what the Lord says...**Fear not,** for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”

**Isaiah 41:10** “**Do not fear, for I am with you;** do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

**Joshua 1:9** “Have I not commanded you? **Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified;** do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

**Deuteronomy 3:22** “**Do not be afraid** of them; the Lord your God himself will fight for you.”

**Zephaniah 3:17** “The Lord your God is in your midst, A victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, **He will be quiet you in His love,** He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.”

**Deuteronomy 31:6** “**Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified** because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

God's comfort and peace is not as the world gives. God's peace is through the gift of the Holy Spirit – the Comforter - given to believers in Jesus Christ at the point of faith. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin - anxious thoughts and agreeing with the evil one's lies. The Holy Spirit enables us to have faith and pray with boldness for the peace and victory that is ours in Christ Jesus.

### Study Guide Questions

1. What feedback have you received from close friends and/or family – those who know you *best* - regarding an area for growth in your life? More simply, what is the *one word* those who know you *best* use when describing a character flaw?
  
2. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. Revisit your response to question #1. Does the feedback you have received regarding an area for growth fall in line with the fruit of the Holy Spirit?  
(Circle)      Yes                  No

Or, does this character quality more closely align with pride, envy, greed, anger or fear? If so, which one, and why?

Pray that your pride will not blind you to the work God intends to do in your life. In humility, ask for the Holy Spirit to convict you of personal sin.

3. How does this character quality affect your relationships at home, work, church, or other settings? (Pray that the Holy Spirit will enlighten you to the healing he desires to do in your life.)

4. A believer in Jesus Christ cannot be possessed by an unclean spirit. A believer may be oppressed by the unclean when creating an entry point – such as our minds. If your life produces the fruit of **fear, anger, greed, pride, control, or envy**, pray:

Lord, I recognize that I have participated with the sin of (as listed above) \_\_\_\_\_ . I take responsibility for participating with and serving the sin of \_\_\_\_\_ . I confess the sin of \_\_\_\_\_ in my family line. Father, in the Name of Jesus of Nazareth I repent to you and ask you to forgive me for allowing this sin of \_\_\_\_\_ to manifest through me.

By faith I now receive your forgiveness. By the power of the Holy Spirit, I take authority over the unclean spirit of \_\_\_\_\_ and break your power in my life. You no longer have any power, right, or authority in my life, and I cast you out. Holy Spirit, I invite you into my heart to heal this area. I ask that you cast down anything that exalts itself above the knowledge of you. I fall out of agreement with the evil one and in agreement with the mind of Christ. Please fill this place with the fruits of your Holy Spirit (select any that are the counterpoint): **love joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self-control**. Thank you for the healing through Christ Jesus. In Jesus' Name, Amen.



## Chapter 8: Perplexed but Not in Despair

There is no comfort without trust. There is no comfort without hope. Comfort lies squarely in the ability to trust God. Faith is built through trials. Through suffering we progress – from faith to faith - in our spiritual pilgrimage. Through tribulations we grow in our ability to rest in Jesus, the anchor of our souls. The apostle Paul wrote: “Not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:4-6). Faith is built as our eyes focus on the Person rather than the plan.

The magnificent sequoia along the California coast – the largest trees on earth - are unable to germinate without fire. It is through heat and pressure that the seedlings emerge. To produce sequoia trees, one must allow forest fires. Diamonds are a result of high temperature and pressure approximately one hundred miles beneath the earth’s crust. Gold, too, is refined in the fire. So too it is often through fiery trials in our lives that the sovereign God brings his plan of redemption – over, against, and through suffering.

Those who love us most are often the very ones who encourage us to give up during periods of great suffering. Job’s wife counseled him to “curse God and die” (Job 2:9). Upon Jesus’ teaching that he must suffer, die, and be raised on the third day, Jesus rebuked Peter for saying, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” (Matthew 16:23). In referencing

the man born blind, the pharisees asked Jesus who had sinned: his parents, or the blind man. Pertaining to the theology of suffering, humanity swings to extremes of thought. On one extreme is the belief that all suffering is the result of personal sin. Conversely, the other extreme is to deny God's sovereignty - "name it and claim it" - making demands of God in self-righteousness and idolatry. During periods of trial, either-or thinking makes for miserable comforters.

All suffering is a result of the Fall. When we suffer the natural consequence of our own sin, we do not question the cause of the suffering. During periods of suffering for sin that is not our own, we find ourselves questioning and seldom have the answer to the question: Why. What the redeemed sufferer *does* understand is that God has called them to suffer.

The cause of joy in suffering lies in the *meaning* of the suffering. The apostle Paul wrote: "Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you and I fill up my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church" (Colossians 1:24). Suffering allows us to fulfill our destiny as witnesses for Christ. Witness in the Greek is *martus*, or martyr. We are witnesses to the perfect Suffering Servant.<sup>14</sup> Christ's suffering was redemptive, so too God uses our suffering for redemptive purposes – to improve us, reprove us, and/or to bring the Father glory. Suffering with Him, we are also raised with Him (Romans 6:8; II Corinthians 1:5).

During suffering for sin that is not our own we are perplexed but not in despair (II Corinthians 4:8b). Our hope is in what we do not see – the Presence of Christ (Romans 8:25).

With the divine assignment to suffer we know we will be given divine assistance and the promise of His Divine presence.<sup>15</sup> Seated next to the Father in the throne room of Heaven, Jesus continually intercedes for the faithful (Hebrews 7:25). The Bible tells us that Jesus saves *to the uttermost* as he eternally lives to pray for us. The Holy Spirit functions as an intermediary between God and humanity: “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Hebrews 8:26). We may not have the answer to *why*. Why is not necessary when one understands *Who*. Through tests and trials, the redeemed sufferer has developed the ability to trust that he or she can accept good from God as well as adversity. “Thou he slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 2:8-10).

Our only hope in suffering, our only hope for comfort, lies in the Person of Jesus Christ: Not the plan, not the outcome, nor what is seen. We trust God’s perfect, sovereign, wise, and good character.<sup>16</sup> When we know His voice and follow Him (John 10:14), we know enough.

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<sup>14</sup>R C Sproul, *Surprised by Suffering* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1989), 39.

<sup>15</sup> Sproul, *Surprised by Suffering*, 24.

<sup>16</sup> Sproul, *Surprised by Suffering*, 53.

## Study Questions

1. Our suffering is purposeful and redemptive. The apostle Paul wrote, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12b). As a Christian, we labor in our sufferings *with hope*. David wrote, "I would have lost hope unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (Psalm 27:13).

It is precisely the presence of Christ in the life of the believer that allows them to stand under times of pressure. As the Apostle Paul wrote, we are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed (II Corinthians 4:8).

In your life, what current fiery trial produces hope in you as a partaker with Christ in his suffering?

2. It is no shame to call on Christ in times of trouble. Nor is it a vice to rely on Him during times of pain. From the examples of Jesus, the earliest followers, and the martyrs throughout the history of the church we are reminded that it is not strange to suffer. Paul wrote, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Do you suffer for Christ? If so, how?

Do you carry His name: Are you His witness (martyr or martyr)?                      Yes      No

If yes: Where and how are you a witness for Christ?

If no: What fear or concern keeps you from sharing the hope that is within you?

Prayer for healing and deliverance from the spirit of fear:

“Lord, please break off the spirit of fear off my life. I confess fear as sin – a lack of trust in the Almighty. Please forgive me for the idolatry of man – the desire to please man, be accepted and conform. I claim the promise, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Deut. 31:6). Praying the Word, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me” (Hebrews 11:6). Please fill me with courage and joy through the Holy Spirit. Teach me to live in your presence, taking hold of every opportunity to share the hope that is within me. I know that victory is ours in Christ Jesus. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

3. Begin to pray for 1 – 2 individuals in your sphere of influence. Pray everyday for the salvation of their souls and for the opportunity to plant a seed - to share the hope that is within you. Pray that your suffering will be redemptive – that God will be glorified through your suffering - through your suffering and witness they will ultimately be drawn to Him.

I will pray every day for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

## Chapter 9

### The Father Runs!

**Read:** Luke 15:11-31, Psalm 42-43

In Middle Eastern first century culture Jewish men did *not* run. Running was unthinkable for it required picking up a long tunic, risking the shameful exposure of bare legs. Yet this is the picture Jesus painted of the Heavenly Father's response to us when we cry out to Him. The Father *ran*.

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. The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you..." But the father said, "Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:20b - 21, 24).

In Jewish culture there is a ceremony known as *kezazah*. The ceremony involves villagers breaking a clay pot upon a Jew losing their inheritance to a Gentile. The shards of clay symbolize being cut off from their people. Reading this account through the lens of first century Jewish culture, we pick up on the importance of the Father's watchful care. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him... (Luke 15:20b)". Watching from afar, the Father was able to intervene on behalf of His repentant son, impeding the villager's humiliating taunts and ridicule. Running to his son, the Father took his son's shame on himself, just as Christ bore our sins on the cross. There would be no *kezazah*.

There is no fear in returning to the Father: No sin is too great. By demanding half the inheritance while his Father was well – and a *younger son* at that - the son was saying to his

Father “I wish you were dead.”<sup>17</sup> Through wild living the prodigal lost his inheritance. Eventually he got a job caring for pigs – an untouchable, unclean animal in Jewish culture. Without food to eat and despised by his people, he was on the lowest rung – he hit bottom. Yet with a single repentant step, the Father ran.

David, the psalmist, paints a picture of God as a watchful shepherd. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4b). The staff is a hook – a candy-cane shaped and cut from sapling. Shepherds used the hook to wrap around the chest of a lamb or neck of wayward sheep, gently guiding them to safe pastures.<sup>18</sup> Jesus taught that the Father leaves the ninety-nine sheep in open pasture in search of the one repentant lamb. When he finds the lost sheep, he joyfully places it on his shoulders and carries it home. This is a picture of the extent to which God goes for those who turn to Him. In the parables God is described as a loving Father who watches, searches *until he finds*, carries, embraces, runs, and celebrates our return home. He is the Lord who forgives and restores all who cry out to Him (Matthew 15:3-7).

I experience great comfort in knowing that my Heavenly Father watches and runs to me at my point of need. In His infinite wisdom, God knows how and when to respond. As newborns in the faith, we cry for a response from God day and night. A spiritual infant demands immediacy and constant reassurance. As we gain spiritual maturity, we come to understand that God is *always* present and *always* listening: A response of “wait” or “no” is for our good. We learn to pray in accordance with God’s will. We come to understand that His plans for our lives are trustworthy, right, and good. With spiritual maturity we develop the

ability to rest in Him as a weaned child (Psalm 131:2).<sup>19</sup>

Twenty years ago, feeling isolated and overburdened in ministry leadership, I knelt in front of the couch in my office and wept, crying out to the Lord in the middle of the night. The next day, early in the morning, a friend called me with a tone of purposeful intent: “Heidi, what’s wrong? The Lord woke me up at such-and-such time to pray for you.” She went on to describe what the Lord showed her in the middle of the night. God saw and heard my cry in the middle of the night. He ran to me. Others may not understand, but I know. I knew the prayers I offered up to God in the middle of the night. And I knew that He ran to me. Oh, the depth of the matchless, limitless love of God.

The psalmist wrote, “My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you... All your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me – a prayer to the God of my life” (Psalm 42:6a, 8). When we cry out with a song of lament in the night, God does not necessarily remove our suffering or distress. The waves and breakers of the waterfall represent hardship and difficult circumstances. As the heavy waters crashed over him, the Psalmist found comfort in the midst of distress.<sup>20</sup> In the cry of the night God did not remove the source of my suffering, but through His abiding presence He gave me the strength to endure.

“Deep calls unto deep in the roar of your waterfalls” (Psalm 42:7). Have you ever heard the echo of a waterfall in the canyon? With each wave of suffering, the Psalmist offered praise for the character of God just as the thundering waters echo in the canyon. As waves and breakers washed over him, the Psalmist calmed his soul – over and over - with the truths



of God's character. As wave upon wave of rushing water flowed over him, the Psalmist continued to praise God.<sup>21</sup> God uses water – our salty tears and the waves of suffering – to cleanse and to comfort.<sup>22</sup> Through lament our pain is spoken, our voice is heard. When our heart wavers, when the evil one whispers lies, the anecdote for our soul is the declaration and rehearsal of God's character:<sup>23</sup> *"But God!"* We must do as the Psalmist: "Why so downcast, O my soul?...Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God" (Psalm 42:11b).

"In *everything* give thanks..." (1 Thessalonians 5:18a). This is a command – there is no getting around it. Thanksgiving involves praise to the Giver of the gifts. Some gifts taste like bitter medicine prescribed by our Physician for lessons our souls need to learn - not because the circumstances are good, but because He is good.<sup>24</sup>

From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. He said: "In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry. You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. ...But I will sacrifice unto you with a voice of thanksgiving. What I vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the Lord" (Jonah 2:1- 3,9).

"Let the storms of life break over our heads. Let the enemy Satan come in like a flood. Let the waves of sorrow, suffering, temptation, and testing be unleashed upon us. Our souls will be kept on an even keel and in perfect peace when the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts."<sup>25</sup>

God runs to us. He runs through the voice of a friend, awakened in the night, to offer comfort in the morning. He runs to us through His comforting abiding presence – the Holy Spirit. And He runs to us as we rehearse His covenantal, unchangeable character. The Father runs.

## Chapter 9 Questions for Personal or Group Study

1. Write about a time when you experienced the comforting presence of the Father when you cried out with a song of lament in the night?

Did this experience affect your faith? If so, how?

2. The prophet Habakkuk wrote:

“Though the fig tree fails to blossom, and no fruit be on the vine. Thou the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls: Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Habakkuk 3:17-18)

What thundering echo of crashing waves – “deep calls unto deep” - are you currently experiencing in your life?

3. The Psalmist wrote, “My tears have been my food day and night” (Psalm 42:3). How have the streams of salty tears or waves of suffering been a source of cleansing or comfort in your life?

How has God used these waters to prune dead branches and produce godly fruit: To improve or reprove your character?

4. The Apostle Paul knew suffering: shipwrecks, beatings, imprisonments, accusations, hunger, and martyrdom. Yet he wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord *always*, and again I say rejoice" (Philippians 4:4). Do you believe the discipline and practice of thanksgiving and the rehearsal of God's character through praise ushers in the comfort of God? If so, how?

Why do you believe God commands us to praise Him and offer thanksgiving in all circumstances?

5. How and when will you make the command of praise (Philippians 4:4) and thanksgiving (1 Thessalonians 6:18) a daily and ongoing discipline in your life?

How do you believe this will affect your outlook and attitude in relation to suffering?

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/six-amazing-things-you-might-not-know-about-the-prodigal-son/102788.htm>, accessed 5/28/20.

<sup>18</sup> Adrian Rogers, *The Lord is My Shepherd* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 48-49.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.heresthejoy.com/2014/08/how-can-i-have-a-soul-like-a-weaned-child/> accessed 5/28/20.

<sup>20</sup> John Goldingay. *Psalms 42-89: Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, Vol. 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 28.

<sup>21</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: Kidner Classic Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1973), 183-85; Logan C. Jones, "The Psalms of Lament and the Transformation of Sorrow," *The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 61, nos. 1 – 2 (Spring-Summer 2007): 47, 53-54.

<sup>22</sup> Dee Brestin, *The God of All Comfort* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 98.

<sup>23</sup> Brestin, *The God of All Comfort*, 85.

<sup>24</sup> Hannah Whitall Smith, *God of All Comfort* (Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2006), 185, 188-90.

<sup>25</sup> Billy Graham, *Our God of Comfort and Hope* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 71.