

## CHAPTER 14

A summary of the book...

### “WHEN YOUR WORLD FALLS APART”

by David Jeremiah

**David Jeremiah wrote this book to chronicle “his experience” with near terminal cancer.** He begins the book with a poem that was very meaningful to him on his journey – “*A Bend in the Road*” – It reads:

*Sometimes we come to a life’s crossroads and we view what we think is the end;  
But God has a much wider vision and He knows that it’s only a bend –  
The road will go on and get smoother and after we’ve stopped for a rest,  
The path that lies hidden beyond us is often the path that is best.  
So rest and relax and grow stronger, let go and let God share your load,  
And have faith in a brighter tomorrow – you’ve just come to a bend in the road.*

**He writes: “Somewhere along your own path, you’ve likely encountered a bend in the road too.”**

Suddenly you have faced circumstances you never expected or wished to encounter, and you read encouraging words from fellow strugglers. Fellow-struggler, **Gordon MacDonald** writes, “None of us enjoy suffering, but pain does have a way of accomplishing the ‘greatest good’ in our lives by drawing us closer to God. God uses ‘disruptive moments’ to help us keep things in perspective.” The apostle Paul writes, “*A thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me*” (2 Cor 12:7ff). God told Paul He would not remove the thorn, but would do something else – in the midst of the ordeal, He would give Paul all the *grace* he needed to continue his work – “*My grace was sufficient for you – because My strength is made perfect in weakness.*” When we are weak, then we are strong – the weaker we are, the stronger His grace is revealed (2 Cor 12:9-10). It is when we are weak that we really learn to “*rely on Christ,*” and that is when we experience “*His power*” in us and accomplish what He desires.

**How quickly we are prone to “strike out against God” when we come to a bend in the road.** Our short-sightedness causes us to become discouraged by the event, lose heart, and want to give up. But no matter how disruptive the event may be, we need to remember that everything that happens to us is for the eternal purposes of God – He is training us through the process, with the ultimate goal in mind of “conforming us to the image of Christ.” British journalist **Malcolm Muggeridge** wisely explained this to William F. Buckley – “*the only thing that has taught me anything is suffering; not success, not happiness, not anything like that... the joy of coming in contact with what life really signifies is suffering and affliction.*” The only road that leads to the destination God desires for us has a number of *sharp bends* – all shortcuts only lead us into the wilderness. **Charles Spurgeon** said,

*I bear willing witness that I owed more to the fire, and the hammer, and the file, than to anything else in my Lord’s workshop. I sometimes question whether I have ever learned anything except through the **rod**. When my schoolroom is darkened, I see most.*

**Your “crisis” is important to God** – Whatever your struggle or setback, it is intended by God to empower and purify you. Never forget that. Five principles we as believers need to remember –

1. Disruptive moments are simply Divine appointments – Every trial we face, difficult as it may be, comes from the hand of God, who loves us and wants us to grow. Seeing disruptive moments as *divine appointments* will keep you from giving in to *discouragement*. The moment we accept the fact that our ordeal has been permitted, even intended by God, our perspective will change. You will find

yourself saying, “God, You have allowed this in my life. I don’t understand it, but I know that it could not have happened to me unless it was filtered through Your loving hands.”

2. Progress without pain is usually not possible – We live in a skin-deep world – all the things the world values are cosmetic. Character and substance are shaped in the crucible of adversity. Pain makes us sensitive to God – without pain we simply end up spinning our spiritual wheels, and we go nowhere. Writes David Jeremiah: “Show me someone who lives a carefree life with no problems or trials or *dark nights of the soul*, and I will show you a shallow person. Author **Gordon MacDonald** said: “The spiritual masters have taught us that the one who would get in touch with ‘*his soul*’ must do so with diligence and determination... because one must overcome feelings, fatigue, distractions, errant appetites, pain, suffering.”
3. The promise of God is the provision of grace – God told the apostle Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you; My strength is made perfect in weakness” – therefore, it is when you are weak, and not relying on your own strength, that you are strong. God must do some pruning in order for us to thrive and bear fruit, but our Gardener is loving and devoted to our well-being. Someone has profoundly said, “*The Father is never closer to the vine than when He is pruning it.*” David Jeremiah writes: “Never in all my life have I sensed the closeness and provision of God as I did when I came to the bend in the road; and never before have I been *more fruitful* than I have been since I came through the bend in the road.”
4. Disruptive moments produce dynamic growth – You can *struggle* against the disruptive moment, shake your fist at the heavens, and find yourself exhausted, defeated and in despair... or you can *accept* the moment and let it train and strengthen you in your inner man. God allows no pain without purpose. His power will rest upon you only when you have abandoned the idea that you are big enough to go it alone. Every plant must weather a storm every now and then. Listen to the words of **Charles Spurgeon** –

*Those who navigate little streams and shallow creeks, know but little of the God of tempests; but those who “do business in great waters,” these see His wonders in the deep. Among the huge Atlantic waves of bereavement, poverty, temptation, and reproach, we learn the power of Jehovah, because we feel the littleness of man.*

5. What we receive from disruptive moments depends upon how we respond – “Why this, Lord?” you might ask. “Why now? Why not later? Why not someone else?” We all ask the *WHY* questions. They are a natural part of being human. But we can ask better questions – we can ask *WHAT* questions: “What Lord?” What would You have me do? What are You trying to teach me?” Reflect upon the words of **Psalms 71** – (1-27)

*In You, O LORD, I put my trust. . .  
Incline Your ear to me, and save me.  
Do not cast me off in the time of old age;  
Do not forsake me when my strength fails.  
O my God, make haste to help me. . .  
You, who have shown me great and severe troubles,  
Bring me up again from the depths of the earth.  
And I shall speak of Your righteousness all the day long.*

**Psalm 71 is an incredible jewel in the Scriptures** – Most scholars believe it was written by David when he was going through some heart-wrenching times as a result of his sons. *Absalom* had turned on his father and attempted to seize the throne. *Adonijah* tried to usurp the throne as well, but David had already promised it to *Solomon*. The cost to David was horrendously heavy; his aging heart was burdened with a deep grief few of us will ever experience. *God's children have no immunity whatsoever to pain or suffering*. Trials can come through friends, or enemies or aging and bad health, but they can also come from God Himself. Peter wrote, “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the *fiery trials* you are going through, as though some strange thing is happening to you” (1 Pet 4:12). Some things cannot be learned through lectures or the written word; they must come at the cost of bruised hands and bloody knees – there are an infinite number of different kinds of trials.

**God sends trouble into our lives to “strengthen us” and to make us better children in His family.** Little by little, over a period of many years, we are stripped of all the things in life that gave us security. It is a season of slowly developing anxiety. David was under attack from his own children... in the midst of his insecurity, he found that God was his refuge, his rock, and his fortress. In those times when we feel the hostile forces of the universe pursuing us, we long for a “*strong refuge*” – the kind of security that can only be found in God Himself. *A powerful leader is invariably self-reliant and independent* – it simply comes with the territory. He charts his own course and depends on his own resources. But sooner or later, he reaches his limit, and he finds he is not self-reliant after all. When their power hits its limit, they will seek a power higher than themselves and begin to experience a feeling of dependency. In that moment of transformation, we come to suddenly realize, “*I don't control my world after all! I have no more ideas and nowhere to run or hide! Lord, only You can rescue me! Make haste to help me, O God!*”

**Someone has said that Psalm 71 is filled with great praise and great complaining all at once.** David's pilgrimage embodies both “*human defeat*” and “*godly victory*” – and that is not an insignificant footnote, for we tend to lack a theology of adversity in the church these days. When David saw the worst life had to dish out for him, he could still remember the perfection and faithfulness of God: “In You, O Lord, I put my trust... deliver me in Your righteousness... incline Your ear to me.” Whenever we face trials, we need to remember who God is – sometimes we get so focused on our “*trials*” we forget to focus on “*Him*.” Five times in Psalm 71 David mentions the “righteousness of God” (vv. 2, 15, 16, 19, 24). David understood that there was one thing he must do when trials were swirling around his head – *he must never forget that God is righteous and good, and He is a God who can be trusted*. Things may be bad, but God is never any less in control, nor does He lower His love for us. Ultimately, we fall on our knees and say, “*My Lord and my God, my hope is in You!*”

**David reminded himself that God had proved “faithful to him” throughout his life.** There in the midst of his suffering, he cried out, “*But still I will continue to hope in You and praise You*” (71:14). This is the mark of the truly godly person. Praising God generally does not happen until we step just far enough outside our own entrenched emotional defenses to take a good look at where God really is. David began to question, “God, now that I am old, are You finished with me?” Never assume God is through with you. Gray hair means nothing. In God's way of doing things, the best is always yet to come. Have you gradually bought into a worldview based on Murphy's Law – “*Whatever can go wrong will go wrong?*” Psalm 71 takes you down a road that leads precisely in the opposite direction. Your cynicism is replaced by faith. You see a godly future in which God bends the world's distorted hopes into His beautiful plan. David has confidence in the future because he has confidence in the One holding it. He writes, “You shall increase my greatness, and encourage me on every side” (71:21).

**Trials are for our “benefit,” as unwelcome as they are at the time.** They make us better men and women. When you have walked through the fire, people begin to listen to you. When you have the wisdom borne of suffering, you begin to have the tools to accomplish something in the world. As God’s children, *“We must learn to live with the insecurities and the ambiguities of life,* knowing that we are secure in Christ; for He is our God.” The psalmist in Psalm 119 said, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.... it is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes” (119:67, 71). Testing makes you walk the straight path, while the untested go astray. **Charles Spurgeon** suffered with prolonged bouts of depression and anxiety, and his psychological and physical ailments were so crippling that he frequently was confined to bed for weeks. But Spurgeon came to see these problems as part of God’s work in his life. *His sufferings enabled him to comfort and encourage the many hurting people who were touched by his ministry.* And he found a pattern to his life – His periods of depression invariably preceded seasons of God’s special blessings on his ministry. He knew he did not suffer without reason. Here are his own words: “This depression comes over me whenever the Lord is preparing a larger blessing for my ministry; the cloud is black before it breaks.” This psychologically frail man, published more than 3,500 sermons, authored some 135 books, and is still regarded today as the “Prince of Preachers” in the modern era. *God is up to something when He sends difficulty our way.* (29-52)

**For every pilgrim in this journey of life, the road will “bend” in a different direction.** When we meet the bend in the road we must look to God for the “*grace*” to meet that defining moment. The old Swedish hymn “*Day by Day,*” written by **Carolina Sandell Berg** (1832-1903), was one of my father’s favorite hymns – he was a devout believer who was born in Sweden in 1898. Berg was never strong as a child, so she spent much time in her father’s study and grew especially close to him. When she was twenty-six years old, she accompanied her father, who was a parish pastor, on a short voyage to Goteborg. As they stood on deck, the boat lurched and Pastor Sandell fell overboard – the crew was unable to save him, and he drowned as his daughter looked on. This tragedy inspired many hymns, including this one. This hymn expresses the heart of God’s child in the midst of trial and difficulty –

*Day by day and with each passing moment,  
Strength I find to meet my trials here,  
Trusting in my father’s wise bestowment,  
I’ve no cause for worry or for fear.  
He whose heart is kind beyond all measure  
Gives unto each day what He deems best –  
Lovingly, its part of pain and pleasure,  
Mingling toil with peace and rest.*

**Even to those of us who follow Christ, the topics of pain and suffering and ultimate meaning are complex and confusing.** How can we cope with them? The Bible tells us that life is like a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes – it is like grass that grows for a season only to be cut down and scattered by the winds. **John Bunyan** paints a masterpiece from that image in his classic book *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Life is a journey, and we must all walk the path. So many of the psalms are written for pilgrims on the path – one of the most helpful is that of Psalm 21. In this psalm we can hear the psalmist crying out, “Lord, I need guidance for my journey... I’ve lost my way... will You show me where to go?”

*I will lift up my eyes to the hills – from whence comes my help?  
My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.*

*He will not allow your foot to be moved, He who keeps you will not slumber...  
The LORD shall preserve you from all evil, He shall preserve your soul... forevermore.*

**In spite of all the “perils” we encounter, we can trust the Lord.** We are never too small for His caring. God’s Word reminds us that “*we are pilgrims and strangers in a foreign land*” whose roads are filled with hazards. The road is long, weary, and dangerous. It winds through veils of tears, but the long winding road finally comes to the *City of God*, the place of joy and feasting. That is the biblical view of life in this world. There are numerous passages that describe the “*mountains*” as a place of blessing (Mt. Moriah, Mt. Sinai, Mt. Zion, Mt. Olivet, Mt. Carmel, Mt. of Transfiguration, Mt. Calvary), but we know all too well that mountains can also be a place of danger. Godly pilgrims have always found a sense of majesty in the “*high country*” – the mountains of life – but they have also found a sense of danger and a fear of the unknown. The psalmist says to himself, “I will lift up my eyes to the hills” – then he breaks off and asks the question, “*From whence comes my help?*” He tells himself, “I’ve looked to the mountains, and I find no help... I’ve looked within, and I find no guidance... finally I looked up, and realized the source of my help – “*My help comes from God!*” God is not merely the *Creator* of all things, He is the *Sustainer* of all things as well (Col 1:16-17). If God numbers the hairs on your head, don’t you think He’s up to date on the larger issues of your life? He will not allow your foot to be moved. Such thoughts should renew our strength to carry on. (53-76)

**In every life, at some point, a person finds himself in that “dark tunnel” where no light is visible.** In agony you cry out in frustration – “*Lord, I can’t take any more!*” “*I must hear from You today!*” If you find yourself in David’s shoes, you fully understand his heartfelt emotions as stated in ***Psalms 13*** –

*How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever?  
How long will You hide Your face from me?  
How long shall I take counsel in my soul,  
Having sorrow in my heart daily?...  
I have trusted in Your mercy;  
My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation...  
Because You have dealt bountifully with me.*

David was a man after God’s own heart, yet he was *a man of anguish and suffering*. One moment he was the toast of the nation, the next he was a young man hiding out in caves. David was a fugitive for eight or nine years! At one point David’s band of faithful followers lost their wives and families (as did David) in a raid, and “they turned their anger toward David!” 1 Samuel 30 tells of David’s deep distress. David was desperate, and out of this pain he cried out to the Lord – “*How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? I have trusted in Your mercy!*” You can see and feel the impatience and desperation David experienced in this psalm (Ps 13). There are some favors that the Almighty does not grant either the first, the second, or the third time you ask Him, because *He wishes you to pray for a long time* and often He wills the delay to keep you in a *state of humility*, and to make you realize the value of His grace.

**On those occasions when you struggle with “God’s timing,”** it is good to know these feelings did not originate with you – David expressed such feelings numerous times. On this occasion he was overwhelmed with a sense of the “*permanence of trouble*.” “Will you forget me forever?” You too will come to the point that God has forgotten you – it is a common experience. We all pass through such “*dark stages*.” We can take a certain amount with our faith intact – but the longer we go without

God's peace and perspective in the midst of bad times, the more *our faith begins to weaken*. It was not until Job realized he was in for a "*long term battle*," that he began to come apart at the seams. Everyone has a point somewhere in the geography of their souls marking "*the limits of their faith*" – it is the point at which faith begins to unravel, and you begin to give up on God. What you really believe is that God has given up on you. The truth of the matter is – God never ceases to care about you. I love the poignant words of Isaiah 49 – "Can a woman forget her nursing child? They may forget, says the Lord, *"but I will never forget you! I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands!"*" (Is 49:15-16). Remember the words of Jesus on the cross – "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*" Next time you begin to think about God's forsaking you, remember, Jesus can identify with your pain (Heb 4:15). And then remember His promise, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you*" (Heb 13:5). But that does not mean we will never "*feel forsaken*" – because our emotions will bring us to that point. You can feel free to express your honest feelings to God – He understands. David was frustrated for two reasons:

1. He was frustrated because of his own "**emotions**" – Like David, when we no longer sense that God is blessing us, we tend to ruminate on our failures and get into an emotional funk. And when our emotions take over, it gets us into such an emotional bind that no matter how hard we try, we know we cannot do the things we know we should do. It happened to David. He was frustrated by his emotions.
2. He was frustrated because of his "**enemy**" – David cried out, "How long will my enemy be exalted over me?" David was the "*king in waiting*" – the waiting period ended up being fifteen years! The blood-thirsty monarch "Saul" had once sent 30,000 men after David! Whose side was God on? God seemed to give Saul everything and David nothing. Can you hear David cry out, "Lord, what do You want from me?" By the way, you need to know that if the enemy ever pursues you, he will be relentless, and you will wonder, "*Lord, how am I ever going to get victory over this problem?*" – I'm doing everything I know how to do, but it is just too much for me!" It is comforting to know that David had the kind of "*dark days*" we do. The psalm does not stop there: David may have thought he didn't have a prayer, but in fact, he was just where God wanted him!

**Our supplications when "God delays"** – True prayer is a spontaneous outpouring of honesty and need from the soul's foundation. *In calm time, we say a prayer – in desperate times, we truly pray*. When you come to the end of your own limited resources – that is when you really pray. David seemed to have come to the last page of his life; hence, he poured out his heart to the Lord – Psalm 13. David is certain that Saul will come out the winner; perhaps he feared being humiliated or subjected to mockery. David was desperate and cries out – "*O Lord, help me!*" "*Please hear my cry!*" He worked honestly through his darkest, most hopeless feelings – then he turned his eyes away from his troubles and fixed his gaze on God. He is suddenly conscious of an exalted and holy God and addresses Him as *Jehovah Elohim* – *Jehovah* reflects God's promises; *Elohim* reflects God's power. David's heart suddenly returned to the conviction that the God who promises is the God who is powerful – at this point *his faith rebounds* and reasserts itself. A similar promise is found in Psalm 138:7-8 – "Though I walk in the midst of trouble... You will save me... *and accomplish what concerns me.*" We must come to the point where we hear ourselves saying, "Lord God, my life is devastated; I am overwhelmed by my problems; I can't go on... in the midst of all this *help me, O God, my redeemer.*"

**In the midst of his crying out to the Lord, David breaks into "joyful song"** (Ps 13:5-6). David's song is a song of triumph. How did he reach that point? He began to see God. Our troubles can cause us to avoid the places where we are most likely to "*see God.*" You need all the church you can get in such a

time. Our faith is not a luxury intended for periods of smooth sailing – when trouble comes along, that is when it is wonderful to be a part of a faithful, Bible-believing body of people who will rally around you, and pray for you, and support you, and encourage you, and counsel you. David said, *“I have trusted in Your lovingkindness; I shall rejoice in Your salvation.”* David knew what the prophet Jeremiah knew – “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (Lam 3:22). At this point, God counseled David’s hurting soul – our Lord never changes. Was David delivered from his plight? No, but his spirit was lifted – and he was once again certain of God’s promises. David remembered all the Lord had done in his life, and how faithful He was – *“God has dealt bountifully with me!”* When we become trapped in the claustrophobia of present trials, we desperately need perspective. “I waited patiently for the Lord... He heard my cry... He brought me up out of a horrible pit, and set my feet upon a rock... God has put a new song in my mouth” (Ps 40:1-3). Our problem is that we become pre-occupied with our *circumstances*; whereas God is preoccupied with our *character*. He will allow the *“tough times”* for the higher good of our character, until He is finished with the great work that is invisible to our earthly eyes. God is never late, nor does He lose control. (77-102)

**We need to “worship” in times of trouble.** Life comes crashing down – it happens to every one of us, you are never prepared, and you have no clue where to turn. How wonderful is the moment when you discover you can run into the arms of a Father who loves you and weeps with you. David wrote, “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me” (Ps 138:7). Psalm 138 speaks to us about worship in times of trouble. David begins his worship by *“giving thanks to God”* – that takes a certain degree of wisdom and maturity to reach that level. When difficulties come, we must struggle to remember our reasons for gratitude to God – that will not happen if we are preoccupied with self-pity and loss. Focusing on our *“misery”* traps us in our own private dungeon – *“gratitude”* is the key to unlocking that prison. God sends storms to force us to look to Him – the thunder gets our attention, and when we are humbled in fear, we are far more likely to approach Him with our whole heart. David praised the Lord for His mercy and lovingkindness – the Hebrew term *hesed* encompasses both of those ideas. **Barclay Ron Allen** penned the wonderful words of the hymn *“I Found a Friend”* –

*I found a Friend when life seemed not worth living;  
I found a Friend so tender and forgiving.  
I can’t conceive how such a thing could be,  
That Jesus cares for even me.*

**God is a “very present help” in time of trouble** (Ps 46:1). We may think He delays because we have our own timetable in mind, but God hears us the instant we cry out. Whatever He chooses to do about our circumstances, He will *“strengthen”* us for the battle (Ps 138:3) – God fills us with *renewed faith* and resolve (Ps 138:4). The Lord divides people into two groups – the lofty and the lowly. “The *proud* God knows from afar” (Ps 138:6); “the *humble* come to Him with desperate hearts and receive His grace, forgiveness and comfort” (Ps 138:6; Jam 4:6).

**Though David was a “man after God’s own heart,” his life was one long procession of problems.** He spent years fleeing the wrath of a king... his nation was at war with everyone in sight... he had marital trouble... his sons openly rebelled against him. David made terrible, fateful mistakes – yet he always remained one of God’s favorite children! David sang, *“He restores my soul!”* He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow

of death, I will fear no evil – *because Thou art with me!*” (Ps 23:3-4). Reflect upon the following words of God to the prophet Isaiah (Is 43:2-3) –

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.  
When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned,  
Nor shall the flame scorch you, for I am the LORD your God.*

**Every believer knows that when we walk through the valley of tears, “God walks beside us.”** God is closest in the crises, surrounding us with His presence – this He has promised. When we navigate troubled waters, God is not only the *Master of the waves* – He is also *Master of the ship*. He never abandons us. He will see the voyage through to its final destination (Phil 1:6). *But we are stubborn creatures who struggle to learn.* We learn the least when the sun is shining and the winds are light. Peace and prosperity have never provided effective classrooms. Crisis and catastrophe, on the other hand, offer master’s degrees – that accreditation makes you a *“Master of Disaster.”* It is the school of hard knocks. Through it all, He is working all things together for our good (Rom 8:28). It is essential that we cling to His promise of continuous perfection – be confident of this! (Phil 1:6). No matter what, you must never forget that when you are deep in the midst of trouble, God is still busy at work in you (Phil 2:13), though He may be doing so out of your sight. Just place a *“God at Work”* sign into that scar where your troubles have taken their toll – He is involved in very expensive renovation. He is perfecting you. You may be paying the bill up front, but you are going to like the beautiful new design and furnishings of your life. When we begin to look at our difficulties from the perspective of the psalms, our depression fades; our hope increases; our love for God is intensified. David’s final appeal was that God *“keep up the good work in me!”* (Ps 138:8). “Lord, continue the work you have begun in me!” (103-123)

**Nobody expects to sail through life without a “little rain” and a few choppy waves;** the fact is, we cannot have “crops” without rain. We never know what lies in the road ahead, and we never know when our world will fall apart. It may come in the active middle years, or perhaps in those mature years. David faced a variety of bitter times of disappointment – his family was ripped by tragedy, bloodshed, and bitterness... his son ***Absalom*** had set his heart on taking the place of power by whatever means necessary – *“he stole the hearts of the men of Israel”* (2 Sam 15:6). David fled into the Judean desert with a number of his followers... while he was there he inscribed the immortal words of *Psalms 63*. David begins by *“calling out for God to come and comfort him.”* The king feels a gaping hole in his heart that only God can fill. His own family has deserted him. His subjects had rejected him. His sole consolation was now his Creator. *He is lonely, sad and empty.* David had already sung the words, “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Ps 42:2). And “My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water” (Ps 63:1). When David speaks of *“longing,”* he has in mind that he has collapsed in every way. His strength had been drained away. He was desperate to be revived. The *“dry and thirsty land of the desert”* that surrounded David physically is the picture of his soul without God. Only God can bring refreshment and a rejuvenated life. “Lord, show me the path of life; for in Your presence is fullness of joy” (Ps 16:11).

**David’s heart always makes for a fascinating picture – he was by no means a perfect man;** his failures are as legendary as his accomplishments; he was a great leader who happened to be a member of that struggling, stumbling band of creatures known as the human race. David ached for communion with God. The great Christian mathematician ***Blaise Pascal*** once said – *“the heart has its reasons which the reason does not know.”* God’s rules fly in the face of logic. Reflect upon this thought – *When we begin*



*to praise God in defiance of misfortune, we align ourselves with the deepest truths of the universe, the place where God dispenses deep wisdom and spiritual maturity. We unleash His victorious power in the world of pain and suffering.*

**In the midst of the “lonely desert road,” what are you to do?** Praise God with every part of your body, mind, and spirit. Learn to “*praise God*” regardless of your personal circumstances, and you will see miracles occur. When treading through life’s desert, it helps to remember God’s help in ages past. Reflect upon the words of *Isaac Watts’* hymn: “*O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come; our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home!*” We also gain a wise perspective by realizing that nothing that is happening to us is a surprise to Him. Furthermore declares the Lord, “I am God, is there anything too difficult for Me?” (Jer 32:27).

**David praised God to “dispel the darkness.”** Helplessness is the real secret and the impelling power of prayer... it is only when we are “*helpless*” that we open our hearts to Jesus and let Him help us in our distress. Needless to say, God calmed the troubled waters of David’s soul; He dealt with his enemies and gave him victory. Just as David made his “*desert journey*” – like the one you and I must travel – close by our side will be a faithful, powerful God, filled with lovingkindness and plans for us, plans that lead to spiritual victory and personal fulfillment. (124-148)

**Some crises are much like an “explosion” that knocks us off our feet,** and leaves us stunned and confused. After the explosion, we have no idea what is coming next; we feel we will never again have hearts filled with joy – only fear. Perhaps your life has been shattered by a bomb. The road goes on. There will be many more peaks and valleys along the way. The “*deep valleys*” are places of spiritual dryness and conflict with God – things David faced and chronicled for us in Psalm 30. After David had at long last become king, his first royal initiative was to *establish the ark of the covenant in the city of Jerusalem*, where it would enshrine the idea of worshiping and trusting God. While enroute to the city, the cart carrying *the ark began to wobble*, and a man named Uzzah reached out and touched the ark to steady it. It was a forbidden thing for human hands to do, and *God struck Uzzah dead* on the spot. David became both angry and afraid. David decided to stop transporting the ark to Jerusalem, and had it placed in the home of a man named Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months. Word trickled back to Jerusalem that everything Obed-Edom touched seemed to turn to gold. King David carefully reviewed exactly what the Scriptures had to say about “*moving the ark*” – he then decided to transport it to Jerusalem. As they proceeded to move the ark, they stopped “every six paces” and offered a great sacrifice of oxen and sheep (as pre-scribed by OT law) – and David worshipped the Lord with great joy and intensity (2 Sam 6:14). Many scholars believe David channeled his heartfelt gratitude into the song we know as *Psalm 30*.

**David prayed in his “sickness,” and the Lord healed him.** He extols the people of God to sing praises to the Lord, “for *His anger* is but for a moment; *His favor* is for life... weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning” (Ps 30:2-5). “Hear, O Lord, and have mercy on me; be my helper!” The time comes when you find yourself at the bottom line of hope or despair – and you cry out saying, “Lord, I need Your mercy! Please help me!” “Lord, You reached down to the darkest depths and pulled me right out of the grave. I was almost gone.” When you know you will see the sun rise again, you start waking every morning thanking and praising God. A “*thankful perspective*” is essential for a joyful, positive life. God has a purpose for you... He loves you... and keeps you alive to bring praise to His name. That should make you see things through different eyes, and cause you to begin each day on

your knees. *David reflects upon the purpose for his healing* – “Lord, let me lift up my life today in service for Your purposes!”

**David takes us once again to the highest reaches and the lowest depths.** He writes, “In my prosperity I shall never be moved... but You hid Your face and I was troubled.” In effect, David was saying, “I thought back on my life to the time when I had everything I had ever dreamed. And I said to myself, *‘I’m set for life – set in stone – I have got it made!’* I am bigger than anything life can throw at me” (Ps 30:6-7). David continues, “*But painful experience has taught me differently – I now realize the great danger of prosperity – how quickly it can all come tumbling down!*” Pride goes before a fall (cf. 1 Cor 10:12). A simple phone call with a single sentence from your doctor will instantly cause all your earthly security to go up in flames. Worldly life is fragile. Eternal life is a gift from God. Nebuchadnezzar was the king of all he could see in the great empire of the Babylonians – he thought it was all the result of “*his hands*” – God showed him otherwise, and ripped the kingdom from him in but a moment (Dan 4:31). He spent the next seven years eating grass out in the field like a beast! He learned his lesson the “*hard way*” – afterwards he praised, extolled, and honored the King of Heaven. The message? – “*Eat enough grass and your world-view will change!*” Nebuchadnezzar finally realized that when you are flying high, filled with your own prosperity, “*God is more than able to burst your little bubble.*”

**Prosperity to poverty can be a “painful negative,” but it is God’s primary means to bring us to Himself.** And when it does, we will identify with the words of David: “You have turned my mourning into dancing” (Ps 30:11). Getting “knocked down” in life is not all negative – consider the “*giraffe*.” His mother gives birth by “dropping him from the wound some ten feet!” How is that for an introduction into this world? After laying there for a few moments, the baby giraffe “struggles to its feet.” About a minute passes and the mother “*knocks the baby down*” – booting it through the air. The calf goes head over heels through the air landing on its side, puzzled and protesting. The reason for the mother’s actions? She wants him to get up – if he doesn’t get up, she will do it again. This process is repeated over and over, and the struggle to get on its feet continues. When the baby grows tired of trying, the mother gives the little one another hearty kick. Finally, the calf rises to her feet, wobbly on its little spindly legs. And then the mother kicks it off its feet one more time! The purpose? *She wants the calf to remember how it got up!* You might be thinking, “This can’t be true!” It is... go look it up!

**God nurtures us in much the same “rough way” sometimes.** And if we are ignorant as to His methods and purposes, the actions can seem cold and even cruel. When we finally struggle to our feet, it seems as if we get knocked down again. But our heavenly Father knows that love must be tough – and it must take the long view. God knows the world will fall apart, and we must be sturdy travelers to stay on our feet. *We must not forget how we got to where we are.* One of the reasons for some of the challenges in our lives is that God is toughening us up, preparing us for warfare against forces intent on destroying us. Oftentimes we look at God’s training and just feel like He’s kicking and abusing us. God created the principle of “*rigorous discipline*” – understand it is for the purpose of training us and remaking us into the image of His Son. (149-170)

**Praying under pressure** – David was a man of faith, but like many believers, he was also a man who struggled with *discouragement* and *depression*. David coped with an abundance of turbulent emotions during his fugitive years. Most scholars believe David wrote at least eight different psalms during his season of flight from King Saul. *When he came to a cave where he could lay low, he poured out his heart to God.* The “*Cave of Adullam*” became David’s “*cave of despair.*” Most Bible scholars believe King Saul had levied a heavy tax on the people; as such, many were joining David’s band in rebellion

over the unfair taxation. Goliath's conqueror was still admired by most citizens of Israel. So David, having entered the cave to be alone, finds himself surrounded by the most distressed citizens of Israel. David confesses to us in Psalm 142:3 that his spirit within is "*overwhelmed*." He has come to a place where he has begun to distrust his own judgment. He is no longer certain where to turn. David's spirit is a picture of disorientation. He is pursued by two armies, one made of soldiers out to kill him, the other of suffering comrades. As punishment for harboring his prey, Saul slaughtered the village of Nob. David realized that he was spiritually responsible for the mass slaying of an entire village, and he is nearly driven insane with guilt. He has entered the darkened depths of the cave to better contemplate the darkened depths of his soul. David closes his eyes with a sinking heart and whispers, "*O Lord God, what would You have me do?*" The following poem regarding men in just such a condition was written by **Charles Spurgeon** –

*Fits of depression come over most of us.  
Usually cheerful as we may be, we must at intervals be cast down.  
The strong are not always vigorous,  
The wise not always ready,  
The brave not always courageous,  
And the joyous not always happy.  
There may be here and there "men of iron"...  
But surely the rust frets even these.*

**The pit into which his soul had plunged was a "dark one"** – David felt everyone had deserted him (Ps 142:4). Problems tend to isolate us. It seems to be a particularly strong tendency for those of us who are males to "*turn inward*" when problems come. We seek the nearest cave that might offer protection from the world. **Alexander MacLaren**: "*The soul that has to wade through deep waters has always to do it alone* – we have companions in joy, but sorrow we have to face by ourselves... unless we have Jesus with us in the darkness, we have no one." **Ella Wheeler Wilcox** is famous for saying the same thing: "*Laugh and the world laughs with you, weep and you weep alone.*" Elijah suffered from this orientation – it was him against the world. The Lord had to remind him that there were a few thousand more soldiers in His army than the prophet thought. Elijah then reflected upon the bigger picture – the one that included God. Here is what we learn from this passage: *Problems encourage isolation, and isolation nurtures misconception.*

**David cries out to the Lord, "I am brought very low"** (Ps 142:6). That is what the condition of depression is all about. David's depression approached desperation – all of his hope and joy were gone. He had allowed his circumstances to drive him *inward* instead of *upward*. He had come to fall back on his own resources. He no longer sensed the presence of God in his life. All believers enter the "*dark cave of depression*" at times; this is particularly true of godly leaders. They wear the mantle of greatness with unease, and – quite naturally – great expectations can lead to "great depression." In the grip of his low spirits, David cries out to the Lord, "Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are stronger than me" (Ps 142:6). David locked himself in the dungeon of despair and threw away the key. There can be no doubt that "*discouragement*" defeated David – he had encountered a "*giant*" that could get into his own head. For the people of God, however, there is never a pit too deep to escape.

**When David felt that he would like to see his enemies all "die violently,"** that is exactly what he says. An important point when "*praying under pressure*" – prayer should be a time of honest, no-holds-barred, straight-ahead communication with God. This is when we cut to the root of the problem, and we

are not afraid to name names. When that happens, we feel a tremendous sense of unburdening ourselves before the most intimate Friend imaginable. He is listening. He cares. He responds. We can tell Him anything at all. God has said we are to “*cast all our cares upon Him.*” Period. **James W. Pennebaker**, Ph.D, a professor at the University of Texas, has conducted a study on this subject –

*Suppressing negative emotions can weaken the immune system and arouse your fight-or-flight system, churning up blood pressure and heart rate... articulating trauma helps us deal with the emotion and oftentimes reduces the need for medication; the net effect is that people can move beyond the stressful event.*

**It is interesting to me that as science stumbles along in the modern world**, it tends to come across truths that we have had for thousands of years in the Word of God. In another study by psychology professor, **Mark. A. Lumley**, Ph.D, at Wayne State University in Detroit – he concludes that it is important for us to honestly express the issues of our lives. That is what the Lord has been trying to tell us all along. Hence, if expressing ourselves in a candid journal or secular environment can be a healthy thing, how much more can “*honest prayerful expression to the Lord*” be healthy? So, tell the Lord exactly what you are feeling, without fear or blame – when you do that, God begins the process of recovery.

**Every second David despaired over the lack of God’s presence... God was right there, as close as ever** (Ps 142:3). David could never find a cave where God was not waiting for him! No believer will ever find himself in a place that is not exactly where God expected him to be! David then cries out to the Lord, “Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name; the righteous shall surround me, for You shall deal bountifully with me” (Ps 142:7). *Prayer will move us from the valleys of despair to the mountaintops of joy* – we can pray our way right through the crises and the losses and the fears. David traveled from prison to praise. (171-193)

**Jesus is a “rock” in a weary land... a “shelter” in the time of storm** – those are the words of a hymn written by **Ira Sankey**. When David Jeremiah was stricken with cancer, it moved into his life like a tornado, demolishing his control over his life, his career, and all his plans for the future. He became consumed with his illness; discouragement gave way to depression, yet deep within there was the nagging question of his faith – he could not give up the life commitment he had made to God. He experienced great spiritual conflict – *How could a believer experience the thoughts and emotions he was feeling? Why had God let him sink into anger, discouragement, depression?* He finally realized that his pain and despair only served to “*draw him closer to God*” than health and happiness ever could. Through the pain, he writes, “I began to know God better... I found a genuine “*friend*” in God I had never known before.” **Psalm 107** celebrates the friendship and the faithfulness of God – it is a beloved hymn of thanksgiving for God’s deliverance. The author paints “*four pictures*” for the reader that portray four great challenges of life:

1. **The Desert** – We might call this one “*Wanderers in the Wilderness*” (Ps 107:4-9). In these verses we read about the experience of being lost in the desert. The psalmist writes, “They wandered in the wilderness in a desolate way; they found no city to dwell in; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.” Many have lost their way in a “*dry wilderness,*” devoid of meaning and purpose. For some the desert is loneliness... others routine futility... others affluence (not what they thought it would be)... the wanderers trudge through the dry sand without hope, seeking the true spiritual home that has always eluded them.

2. **The Prison** – This picture is of a group of prisoners who “sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, bound in affliction and irons” (Ps 107:10-16). People are like prisoners, trapped in the dungeon of their own moral folly. *The wrong choices become patterns of behavior that finally master them* – the drug addict, the alcoholic, the sex addict – people are taken prisoner by their own conduct. Some are trapped by difficult circumstances from which there seems little hope of escape – these prisons might have been constructed by other people’s evil, by persecution, or by matters over which they have no control. We do not have to be at fault to become hopeless captives.
3. **The Hospital** – The author writes, “Fools, because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, they were afflicted; they abhorred all manner of food, and they drew near to the gates of death” (Ps 107:17-22). This is a ward of illness and affliction, and it serves as a corridor that opens into the darkness of death. Not every illness, of course, is caused by sin... but people here have poisoned themselves with their own transgressions. *They are suffering, ready for the release brought only by death.* They lie there in the ward, waiting only for their final moments on this earth. **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** appropriately penned these words –

*In me there is **darkness**, but with Thee there is light.  
I am **lonely**, but Thou leavest me not.  
I am **feeble** in heart, but Thou leavest me not.  
I am **restless**, but with Thee there is peace.  
In me there is **bitterness**, but with Thee there is patience;  
Thy ways are past understanding, but Thou knowest the way for me.*

4. **The Storm** – This is a picture of men on a ship caught in a furious storm, fearing for their lives. “Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters, they see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep... *their souls melt because of the trouble.* They reel to and fro, and stagger like drunken men... then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses, and calms the storm, and guides them to their desired haven. Oh that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness” (Ps 107:23-32). These sailors realize their small stature, their seeming insignificance – out on the open sea. There is no land in sight. There is no one to rescue them in their peril on the sea. David Jeremiah writes, “When I have encountered the storms of my own life, I have taken encouragement from this psalm. Though I feel certain that I am pursuing the will of God for my life, my faith is sternly tested by the wind and the rain.” *Great works are done in deep waters.* Jesus tells us to launch out into the deep. This is not only true in the spiritual world, it is also true in the physical world – *play it safe and you will never build a business;* launching a new firm is launching out into the deep. The storms are certain to come, and the winds will howl. *No one ever said it would be easy out in deep waters.* No one ever guaranteed fair weather and smooth sailing. It is your choice – stay along the shore and you will always be safe from drowning and disaster – but you will also never know the blessings of the deep things of God.

**By the way, the storm in this psalm is “from the hand of God”** (Ps 107:25) – It is “He” who has commanded it. Conversely, it is God who sends the winds and the rains. We are much more comfortable crediting God with *calming* the storms than with *causing* them. The Bible teaches us that He is Lord of all – and that includes the storms that “*serve His purposes*” along with everything else. Let’s be careful, however, before blaming God for every storm. Sometimes we have done just fine on our own bringing on those dark clouds. We make mistakes, and God’s place is simply to let us discover how deeply we need Him when we are just about to go under the waves. But in this passage (Ps 107),

we are not referring to those “*self-induced tempests*.” We are talking about storms brought about expressly by “*divine appointment*” – and those do exist. Listen to the words of the author of **Psalm 66** –

*You brought us into the net; You laid affliction on our backs.  
You caused men to ride over our heads – we went through fire  
and through water; but You brought us out to rich fulfillment (66:11-12).*

**Even rebellious, dispassionate “Jonah” knew Who was behind the storms.** Here was a God who could trouble the sea. Jonah realized that he could run, but he could not hide. The Lord sent the storm just as He sent Jonah. Jonah was God’s messenger to the Ninevites... but the storm was God’s message to Jonah. Are you experiencing a “*storm*” in your life? Is it intended to cut off your flight from God, as in the case of Jonah? Perhaps it is to draw you closer to God. *If you are weathering a storm, you can be certain the winds are no random weather front – they blow for a clear purpose.* As you are caught up in a tempest, ask God to help you be caught up in His purposes. The psalmist writes, “Their soul melts because of trouble; they reel to and fro, and stagger like drunken men, and are at their wits’ end” (Ps 107:26-27). The expression “*at your wits’ end*” comes from this psalm. When we find ourselves in one of God’s storms we come to the end of all our own ideas and strategies, and the tempest masters the vessel. The wind and the waters are now navigating the ship; the passengers can do little but watch and pray. Writes **Augustine**: “*Usually prayer is a question of groaning rather than speaking, tears rather than words – God does not ask for words from men.*” The psalmist states, “Then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses. The greater the storm, the shorter and simpler we pray – starting with the most classic of all prayers, “*Help!*” Our only hope is to reach beyond ourselves to *Someone* stronger than we are, and stronger than the shackles that bind us.

**God’s part in the storm is a sensitive topic for many believers;** they fear that if they stopped to consider that God may be the Author of the storm, *they might become “angry” with God.* God knows that “*lesser pain*” is a necessary part of avoiding “*far deeper pain*” later – it hurts to pull out a thorn, but the pain of leaving it in causes the deeper pain of infection. The fact is, God knows that He has to pull out a few thorns every now and then, and that we will cry out in pain and even anger at Him. Furthermore, God loves us enough to bring us to our knees in fresh dependence on Him – “*storm-tossed passionate prayers*” are the most effective prayers we pray. God is especially near to us when we are hurting. When God “*calms the storm*” (Ps 107:29-30), He then gives comfort and relief. It has been wisely said, “*We are far more secure in the storm with Jesus in our boat, than we ever are on the shore without Him!*” If you have chosen to pursue the adventure of following Jesus, you have already discovered that the journey does not occur in a luxury limousine. God will lead you to and through some rough places. In all likelihood, there will come a time when you will say, “*I didn’t sign up for this!*” Just cling to the knowledge that you could be in no safer place than a storm of God’s making.

**“Grace through the storm” is a function of believing that the Creator of the storm is also the Deliverer from it.** Downpour or desert... dungeon or disease – the specific facts of the crisis ultimately do not matter – for God is in control. Wherever we are, whatever we may be up against, when we cry out to God in our trouble, *He will hear us... He will calm the waters.* The time may come when He will even let us know the reasons He unleashed them. The purpose of the storms in our lives is to “*guide us to our desired haven*” (Ps 107:30). Crises never leave us the same as they found us. Those of us who love and trust God through the worst of times, find that our hearts have been changed by the time the stillness replaces the storminess. And our goals will have moved closer to His own. Ask Jonah. As incredible as this may sound, God changes our “*want-to*” in the midst of His storms.

**When God calms the storm, what is there for us to do but to “praise our God?”** If you have been hopelessly lost in a barren wilderness, or shackled mercilessly in a prison, and suddenly you find yourself in a beautiful oasis. What do you do? “Oh that men would thank and praise God for His goodness” – that is the response for each of the four scenarios depicted in this psalm (Ps 107:8-9, 15-16, 21-22, 31-32).

**God is our refuge and strength, a “very present help” in trouble** (Ps 46:1). The psalms area dotted and drenched with more tear stains than any other part of the Bible. Every conceivable emotion from ecstasy to anger to despair can be found in these pages. If there is one great message in the psalms, it is that *our pain is real, but God’s presence is just as real*. The psalms bear witness to the fact that we are not the first to walk down the difficult roads of disappointment and pain and bitterness. Here we find hope in the time of storm, even when the thunder and lightning cause us to run for shelter. There can be no more powerful “*healing balm*” than the wisdom we find in the psalms. Writes Jeremiah:

*Whenever I have suffered, the psalms have provided my medicine toward healing.  
When I have most needed these verses, no commentaries or scholarly notes have been necessary.  
The simple and heartfelt words I have found in the psalms have always been enough.  
It is in the psalms that I have learned to swim to deeper depths.*

**Here is the history behind the writing of Psalm 46** – The year was 701 BC. The king of Assyria – **Sennacherib** – was a man who struck terror in the hearts of those in the Mediterranean world. He was obsessed with expanding his kingdom, which had rapidly risen to dominance. He led his army on a ruthless march throughout the Mediterranean world – *the Assyrians consumed and conquered everything in their path*. The Assyrian Empire was a cruel and mighty one, capturing and enslaving numerous kingdoms. Finally, Sennacherib came across a little kingdom called “**Judah**” – the center of which was the city of Jerusalem. In that day Judah was ruled by a godly man named **Hezekiah** – he was absolutely intolerant of idols and statues and pagan shrines that were inconsistent with the God of Israel; he destroyed them and pointed his people back to temple worship and godly sacrifice. “*He did what was right in the sight of the Lord*” (2 Kg 18:35-37). The Assyrian monarch had already conquered the northern kingdom of Israel – he marched them off into captivity to spend the rest of their lives as slaves. Confrontation and destruction was just as certain for Judah. When the Assyrian king taunted the people of Judah, the prophet “**Isaiah**” gave a word of encouragement to Hezekiah. In essence he said, “*Relax, God says that everything is under control; simply ignore the challenges of Sennacherib*” (2 Kg 19). After repeated taunts and a “*letter*” from the King of Assyria, Hezekiah spread the menacing letter out before the Lord – and prayed for God to save them, “that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Jehovah alone is God” (2 Kg 19:19). The result was *an angel of the Lord came by night and executed 185,000 Assyrians* (2 Kg 19:35). All the people of Judah quickly realized that “this moment” would forever be celebrated in the history of their nation – the psalm penned to commemorate this day was Psalm 46 – probably written by Hezekiah or Isaiah. Psalm 46 towers over us today as *a biblical monument to the awesome and limitless power of God*. It shows us that with God “all things are possible.” **Psalm 46** divides neatly into three sections –

1. **When trouble comes, “retreat to your refuge”** (vv. 1-3) – Our God is an awesome refuge – this idea is sprinkled throughout the OT (Deut 33:27; Ps 18:2; 91:2). At the first sign of trouble, we naturally rely on our own resources – when that fails, we may call upon a friend or godly counselor to help, but “God” is our refuge – “*a very present help in trouble.*” **Martin Luther** based the most important hymn of the Reformation on Psalm 46 – “*A Mighty Fortress is our God.*”

*A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;  
Our helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.*

This hymn became a great source of strength and inspiration for God's people during the Reformation, especially to those who were martyred for their convictions. If you travel to Germany and visit the place where Luther is buried, you will find the first line of this psalm engraved on his tomb. Our God is a "*very present help in trouble*" – when trouble rolls in, He moves in closer and puts His arms around us and holds us close to His chest. *Therefore we will not fear*, though the earth be moved, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea – *God is present*. Read this psalm.

2. **When trouble comes, "rediscover your strength"** (vv. 4-7) – Difficult times force us into the waiting arms of God. When we realize that He is in control, we are overjoyed and immensely comforted. When we come to the sobering realization that our resources are fully spent, that is when we learn that God is more than a refuge – *He is also our strength*. In ancient times, most people feared being cut off from supplies of food or water should powerful invaders come to conquer them – if the enemy waited long enough, he could stop you from getting the things you needed outside the city walls. The city of Jerusalem was a "walled city," and Hezekiah had taken steps to make sure they were well-prepared for an onslaught from Assyria's king, Sennacherib. In the Kidron Valley, just outside the city was a *deep spring called Gihon* – it provided the water supply for Jerusalem, so it was of enormous strategic importance. Hezekiah redirected the spring through a conduit that was 1,777 feet long, hewn of solid rock. He had the spring waters brought into the city beneath the walls of Jerusalem into a reservoir in the middle of the city. Then he covered up all traces of the spring in such a way that Sennacherib would have no idea where the water supply was. If the angel of the Lord had not destroyed the Assyrian army that night, the people of Judah would still have had fresh water for a lengthy period of time. There is reference to this spring in this psalm in verse 4 –

*There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God,  
The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.*

The Holy Spirit is the eternal spring that never runs dry for us as believers – He is a secret fountain of life-giving water (Jn 4:13ff; 7:37ff). The message here is this: Why should we look "*outside*" for help when trouble comes? Almighty God lives "*inside*" of us to satisfy our thirst. God is in our midst, and He shall not be moved; God shall help us, just at the break of dawn" (46:5-7); interestingly enough, that is precisely the time the angel of the Lord destroyed the Assyrians. The armies of Judah may have been outnumbered, but there was one Warrior – God – who tilted the scales toward a rout of the Assyrians.

3. **When trouble comes, "redirect your thoughts"** (vv. 8-11) – In times of trouble, God's advice to us is not abstract, but pragmatic. He offers us a sound battle plan. The Lord reminds us that *our mind* is a powerful element in our armory. Our "*thought patterns*" are crucial in the midst of our difficulties. Any soldier will tell you that the moment the enemy can be demoralized, he is beaten. A sanctified mind can stand against any worldly foe. God's Word over and over again instructs us to "*remember the works of the Lord*" – "Behold the works of the Lord; He has wrought desolations in the earth; He makes wars to cease; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two" (Ps 46:8-9). The people of God could always look back, even from bondage, and say, "*Remember how the angel of the Lord slew the Assyrians?*" The psalmist writes, "*Be still and know that I am God – the God of Jacob is our refuge*" (Ps 46:10-11). Frequently we are too busy squabbling and playing games and doing every-



thing but listening – God says, “*Be still and know that I am God.*” We are enjoined to be silent that we may become aware of His presence and purposes. “*The Lord of hosts is with us*” – think about that! And remember, just “*one angel*” was dispatched from heaven to defend the city of Jerusalem and he destroyed 185,000 Assyrians. The people of Judah needed only one angel – as His children we have the Lord Himself with us! He is the One who created and empowers the angels! Our God is *Emmanuel* – “*God with us!*” – He is a very present help in time of trouble.

**David knew about the “night seasons” of life** – Psalm 16 is the evidence of that. Scholars suggest it may have been written during a brief interlude of peace, immediately after David refused to take Saul’s life while sleeping in a cave. Though David’s men enjoined him to kill Saul, “David refused to stretch out his hand against *God’s anointed*” (1 Sam 26:9); instead, he took Saul’s spear and water bottle as proof that he had spared his life when he easily could have killed him. Later Saul acknowledged that he was the one who had sinned... he was the fool... and he was ashamed of himself. So David now finds himself in a temporary oasis of tranquility. He is no longer running for his life, and he is able to enjoy peace of mind. He takes the time to reflect upon all the good things he has received from the Lord – **Psalm 16** is the record of his spiritual inventory. This psalm exhorts us to –

- 1. Remember Who God “Is”** (vv. 1-4) – David begins at the beginning – he acknowledges who God really is: “Preserve me, O God; in You I put my trust... my goodness is nothing apart from You.” David looks within himself and gravely observes that he finds “*no goodness apart from God.*” Can you say the same thing? That is among the most profound revelation that can ever come to us. There is no good thing within us or about us or connected to us that does not come from God – “every good and perfect gift is from above” (Jam 1:17). One argues, “*I make my own bread*” – *Oh, is that right?* Where did the grain come from? It grew because God caused the sun to shine and the rains to shower down upon the earth where the grain was planted. Further-more, David had been surrounded by a group of dedicated friends during his wilderness wanderings – *God had never failed to provide a friend for him*; as such, he never had to be alone. Do you go it alone when times are tough? God never intends you to do so. Loving people and loving God are closely related (Jn 13:35; 1 Jn 3:14; 4:7-8). David reflects upon his relationships with the people of God – godly friends that God had placed in his life. Who are the godly friends God has placed in your life? Have you ever thanked Him for them? David then goes on to say that the sorrows of the pagan and the ungodly are multiplied – note the contrast.
- 2. Reflect on What God is “Doing”** (vv. 5-9) – David now takes a look at God and at what He is doing in his life at the present time. *God never sleeps.* He is always at work, fine-tuning the minute details of our lives. “You, O Lord, are the portion my inheritance and my cup” (v. 5) – the Lord is the One who makes us complete and provides for us whatever we need. This is the answer to the Lord’s Prayer when it says, “*Give us this day our daily bread*” (Mt 6:11). Realize what a blessed privilege it is to be provided with the essentials of life. David goes on to say, “You maintain my lot” – *God took care of his circumstances.* David had lost nearly everything, yet he is able to praise God for providing for him in his time of need. Therefore, *the Lord is his contentment* – “*The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places.*” Look back on your life and see how God has provided for you over the years – raised in a godly home, had godly friends, godly education – have the lines not also fallen for you in pleasant places? In no way do we deserve the “*blessings*” we have been given. How is it that we come so often to feel just the opposite? Thinking that we have the worst fortune? Nothing ever goes our way? Everyone else has it better? *Check the record.* Self-pity throws everything out of perspective. Stop and think about what it is that we *do* deserve. Contentment is

not something that happens automatically – it is something that develops intentionally – all babies are born discontented. We learn contentment through conditioning our minds to “*dwell on our blessings*” (Phil 4:11). David then reflects upon the fact “*the Lord is his counsel*” (Ps 16:7). Scripture tells us that when we lack wisdom, we should simply go to God and ask for it (cf. Jam 1:5). God is always at work in our hearts – even when we are deep in sleep – it is as if He does *His holy maintenance work on our minds and hearts as we rest*. So during the night, a quiet miracle takes place, and you wake up feeling entirely different about things in the morning. After considering God’s blessings, David acknowledges, “*the Lord is his confidence*” (Ps 16:9).

3. **Rejoice in What God is “Going to Do”** (vv. 10-11) – David first rejoices in the fact that one day he will actually be *resurrected*: “For You, O Lord, will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One (the Lord Jesus) to see corruption” (v. 10). David, obviously, would never refer to himself as “Your Holy One,” therefore the Holy Spirit must have given him a glimpse into the future; but we cannot be certain that David grasped the full meaning of the events to which he was pointing. The apostle Peter confirmed that David was referring to “*Christ’s resurrection*,” by quoting this passage in his Pentecost Sermon (cf. Acts 2:24-28). David’s view into the world of eternity is startling, because it actually surpasses even that of the prophets. David responded to the death of his child, “*One day I shall go to him*” (2 Sam 12:22-23). Thus he knew there is a place called “*heaven*” and *God cares for His helpless little ones*. David then brings a beautiful ending to this psalm by declaring, “*You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore*” (v. 11). The “*path of life*” leads through all the troubles and cares of the world and right into the holy presence of God. In effect David says, “I’ll walk down that path one day, and be in a land where joy is made full, and pleasure can be found at God’s right hand.” Paul essentially said the same thing: “*To live is Christ*.” **Oswald Chambers** makes the following statement –

*No one experiences “complete sanctification” without going through the burial of the old life. If there has never been this crucial moment of change through death, sanctification will never be more than an elusive dream. There must be the **burial of the old life** and a **resurrection into the life of Jesus Christ**. Nothing can defeat a life like this.*

**Can you look beyond the terrible frustrations of poor health, family trauma, or a crisis in business**, and believe that God is preparing a sumptuous feast for you? And praise the Lord Jesus because you know He is your rock and your salvation? David was able to do that. Countless believers throughout history have found that *the dark seasons of life have not been defined by the absence of God*, but somehow, by the miraculous, closer presence of God. They have stared at the emptiness of death and realized that it held the fullness of a feast. The bending path can seem like a lonely one, and we must all walk it. *I hope God’s Word will be your “beacon” in those dark times*. Never forget the Bible offers us a “storehouse of guidance” in the field of adversity. We continue to fight daily battles with the forces of sin, which want so badly to infiltrate our lives and spread so insidiously. We travel this road for the days that God has ordained for us, taking in the difficult curves as well as some wonderful scenery along the way. The journey is rewarding, and the destination is the only one worth the traveling. The ‘ole Irish poet traditionally blessed the traveler with these words –

*May the road rise up to meet you, with all its snares and hazards,  
in the grace and wisdom and wonderful sufficiency of God.*