

Psalm 116

This psalm is about things *going south* in our world. This world is not our home. God wants to bless us here; but to keep us from falling in love with this place. This is a sin-cursed place of continual disappointment. God is using it to steer us towards heaven. We can lose track of that as we find things down here that we like to do. The scriptures tell us to do our best in all that we do with all of our might.

One problem is found in the poor results that can accompany a good effort. We can be obedient; but we cannot actually control the outcome of anything. We need to *manage our expectations*. We can set ourselves up for disillusionment. Regardless, God blesses us and helps us to figure it out. We have a purpose here; but it is not what this world is selling. We have a vision of what victory looks like. We can be completely confused about what our role is in certain situations.

We might suffer a loss so that *the team* can advance. We do not get to be *the hero of every story*. We are *wounded healers*. We are *sincere hypocrites*. We can be the antithesis of what we advocate. That is just how it works when a broken man serves a perfect God. It can take a lot of divine intervention for us to see that we are like helpless baby birds in God's hand....and yet we can still be agents of mercy to others

We will face overwhelming situations. I used to think that this was just a fair warning; but I now see it as a prescriptive promise from God. It is necessary for us. It is not just a result of a sin-cursed world. It is *built into our recovery formula* for salvation and growth. I now realize that I need to embrace this reality rather than curse it. This is what the book Pilgrim's Progress is based on. A man who sees that his city is heading towards destruction escapes, and begins to fight his way up the spiritual mountain.

Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (John 16:31-33)

I used to get frustrated that my devotion seemed to be met with difficult circumstances. I would pray to walk in the Spirit and then all hell would break loose in my life. What is up with that? I also have learned to not worry about how circumstances reflect upon me. All

of this peripheral frustration is part of something bigger than my view; and working towards my spiritual upgrades.

The scriptures tell us that we are loved and protected; but we are still insecure. We really need to see the difference between the flesh and the spirit in our lives. That involves a lot more than the mere desire to do good or evil. Becoming a spiritual man involves the removal of the power of the flesh. It is a progression of battles over strongholds in my life. It is like a snake shedding a skin.

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

It is hard to advance in our faith in the absence of opposition. We almost need to be roused from our sleep by intrusion. It is something that happens over and over and over. It is also hard to see the immediate benefits. This chapter describes the importance of having personal experience with God's deliverances.

Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? (2 Cor. 11:23-29)

Why were Paul and so many other believers subjected to so many perils? Why do I worry; though I know that I am in God's hands? I need to reevaluate all of these little battles I obsess over.

Read Psalm 116:1-4: We need to have a relationship with God. Without divine intervention that is not likely to happen. People do not turn to God until they have exhausted all other avenues of deliverance. Our personal crises may be what indirectly saves us from never knowing God.

The bible describes us as timid sheep, who are ignorant. Some of the most intelligent people in the world are the most concerned. They see more things that can go wrong. The bible also tells us that some information and knowledge is more than we can handle. There are also times when it appears that our life is genuinely in jeopardy. The psalmist is about ready to lose his life. What is the purpose of these extremely stressful situations?

Perhaps we also have experienced being rescued from a life and death situation; or perhaps not. It tends to bring out an immediate fervency in prayer.

Sometimes desperate situations come to believers who are tuned out. Consider the predicament of the prophet Jonah. He was angry and depressed by the way God was being graceful with his enemies. He tried to run away from his problems; and he was going nowhere. God sent a great storm. Even the experienced sailors thought that they would all perish. Jonah was thrown overboard to appease God's anger. Put yourself in Jonah's shoes. You could not swim to shore. You were truly at death's door. Jonah was surely at his wit's end. God supernaturally sent a fish to swallow him and save him. Jonah went into the fish as an unwilling prophet. He exited the fish somewhat more open minded. He thought he was dying, so he was moved to soften his position. Jonah had probably been ignoring God. Now he was praying with all of his might.

Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly. And he said: "I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, And He answered me. "Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, And You heard my voice. For You cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the floods surrounded me; All Your billows and Your waves passed over me. Then I said, 'I have been cast out of Your sight; Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.' The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; The deep closed around me; Weeds were wrapped around my head. I went down to the moorings of the mountains; The earth with its bars closed behind me forever; Yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God. "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; And my prayer went up to You, Into Your holy temple. "Those who regard worthless idols Forsake their own Mercy. But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord." So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. (Jonah 2)

Sometimes desperate situations come to completely compliant believers. Job was unlike Jonah. He was obedient to God; but he was a worry wart. He felt like he had everything

to lose. Job had become a *prisoner of his possessions*. He worried about his family and assets all of the time. God can give us blessings; but our emotional state and perspective has to be right to appropriately receive these gifts as blessings; and entrust them to God.

For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, And what I dreaded has happened to me. (Job 3:25)

Some high anxiety moments are for obvious reasons. Sometimes they seem to be more about perception. Can a born-again believer suffer from panic attacks? Can we carry stress over our future commitments? Can we lose sleep over our loved ones' health?

Read Psalm 116:5-11: Sometimes desperate conditions are required to remind me *how dependent I am on God*. I can get wrapped up in worrying over my commitments. I can build up a false sense of confidence in my career, my plans, my relationships or my health. God blesses us with all of our needs; but we need to be reminded that even our subatomic particles are moving according to his power. We are constantly confusing our blessings with the source of all blessings.

You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," Even the night shall be light about me; Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You. For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. (Psalm 139:5-14)

Even my prayers can become an obsessive-compulsive reactionary response. That is not the best way to pray all of the time. Sometimes I personally have to get to the point where I just have to let go of all of my perceived outcomes; and ask God for help. Sometimes there are too many things to even address. Just the review of the *open issues* can be stressful. My prayers can quickly transition from an organized list into a fire alarm. God takes me to the place where I have to change my rest and prayer focus. When things get too stressful; all I can do is focus on my relationship with God. I just throw my hands up, and ask to be obedient and that somehow God would be glorified. When *my*

sense of control and reason go into *overcurrent* I have to just ask God to intervene into all of my affairs and make me glorify him. In a sense; this whole exercise can be considered *a prayer format correction*. We can obsess over our *grocery lists* for God to such a degree that there is no adoration, thanksgiving, praise or waiting on him.

A few years ago I was doing a lot of multitasking on a project. I got back to the apartment one evening and I suddenly had a memory erasing moment. I could not remember what was on my long list of things I needed to do tomorrow, that week and that month. It had been constantly in my thoughts keeping me up at night. It was like overloading a computer's short term cache memory. There is nowhere for all of that ongoing processing to go. It stressed me out; because I did not know if I was experiencing the beginnings of a breakdown or a stroke. It was neither. I think that God was using it to redirect my focus. More recently I still find myself at similar crossroads of not knowing precisely what to do in a given situation. Instead of re-visiting it 30 times and obsessing over it, I focus on my walk with God that day. It seems like a copout to do that, but it really works. All I have to do is address it in prayer and follow up when I get direction. The rest takes care of itself.

Read Psalm 116: 12-19: Even obedient followers of Christ need adjustments and corrections. The psalmist describes having our bonds loosened. Our physical predicaments can parallel our spiritual confusions. These rescue exercises save our being from destruction; but we may not even be aware of what God is really addressing on a deeper level.

Anyone who has been delivered by God has a different perspective than someone who has not. When I talk to a former drug addict who has been saved I see an entirely different perspective than someone who has not been pulled out of a serious mess. Some things can be taught and other things have to be *caught*. Reading the word and memorizing it is helpful; but having to walk in its promises into the unknown is an entirely different thing. We need to have skin in the game to process the lesson.

Without the enemy's antagonisms and personal perils we will become the soft underbelly of the church. Christianity is not just a free-choice smorgasbord. It is not just a pleasure cruise on the *love boat*. We are to be more like commercial fishermen engaged in our father's business, and all that goes with it.