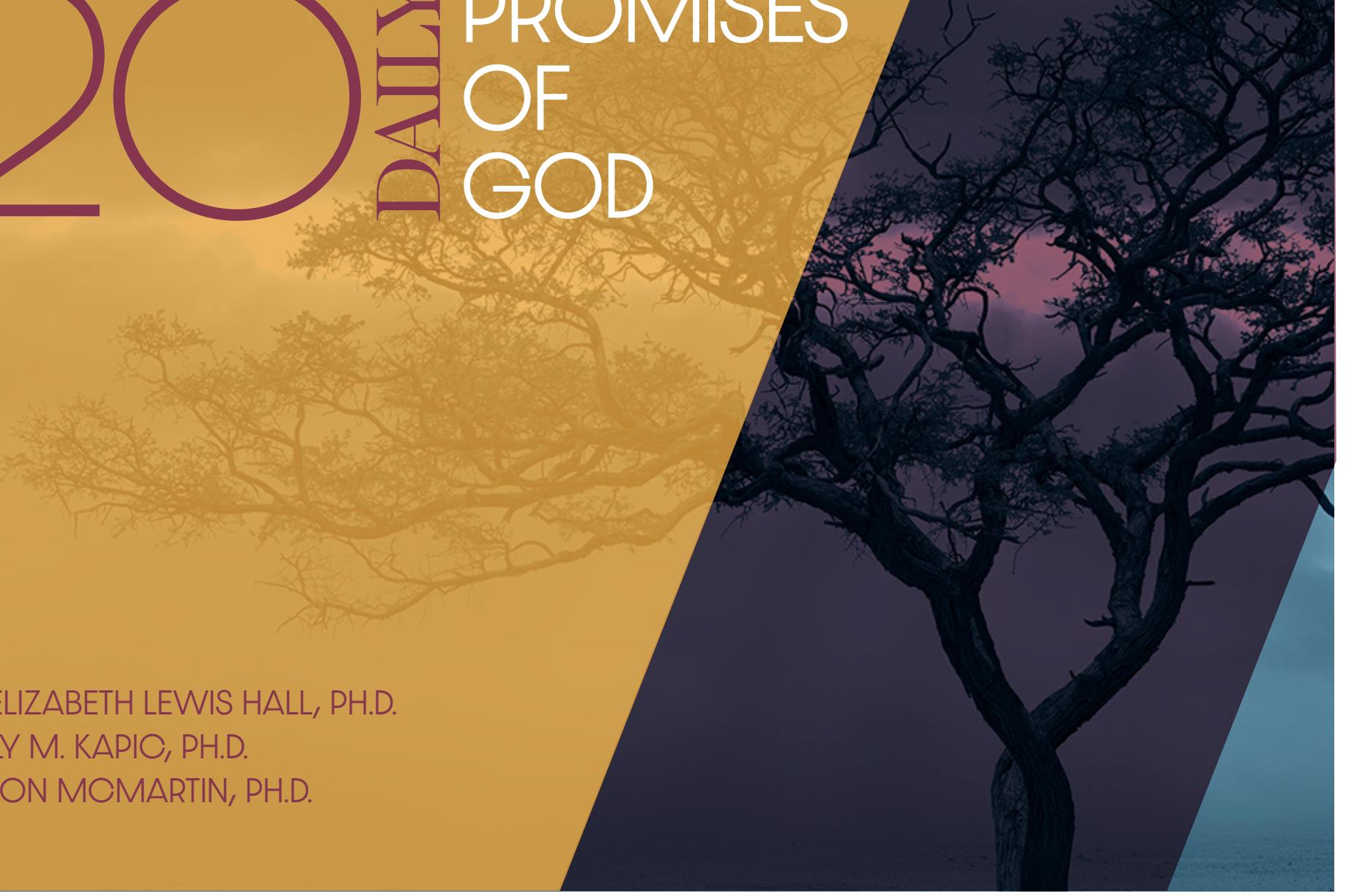


# 20 DAILY PROMISES OF GOD



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# INTRODUCTION

When we are experiencing suffering we can feel very disoriented. It feels like the world is spinning or the rug has been pulled from under our feet. We may feel like we're being pummeled by a storm or that the waves are crashing over us. We want a firm place to stand and a place that is protected from the wind and the rain.

In Scripture, God gives his people many promises. Like the house built upon the rock, these are firm places to stand. They can anchor us and protect us. Rather than being swept away, we can find firm footing.

In this twenty-day devotional, we're going to spend time learning about and studying the promises of God in the midst of difficulty. Each day will focus on one or two key passages that reveal God's promises to sustain, preserve, and grow us even through our hardships.

# DAY 1 : THE PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read these passages about eternal life:

## JOHN 3:16

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

## JOHN 17:2-3

*For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

When we face suffering, one of the most comforting promises God gives us is the promise of eternal life. This promise reminds us that our current struggles, no matter how overwhelming they may feel, are not the end of our story. Jesus defines eternal life not merely as endless existence, but as knowing God and Jesus Christ. This knowledge is not intellectual but relational—it's an intimate, personal relationship that begins now and extends forever.

The promise of eternal life transforms our perspective on present suffering. While our pain is real and should not be minimized, we can find comfort knowing that it is temporary compared to the eternal joy that awaits us. This doesn't mean we should ignore or spiritualize away our current difficulties, but rather that we can face them with hope, knowing that God's love has secured for us a future where all tears will be wiped away and all brokenness will be healed.

Consider how God's love is demonstrated in John 3:16—He gave His only Son so that we might have eternal life. This sacrificial love is the foundation of our hope. When we feel abandoned in our suffering, we can remember that God loved us enough to give what was most precious to Him. This same God who did not spare His own Son will surely care for us through every trial we face.

The definition Jesus gives in John 17:3 is profound—eternal life is knowing God and Jesus Christ. This transforms eternal life from a quantity of time to a quality of relationship. It begins the moment we believe and deepens through every experience, including our sufferings. Our trials can actually deepen our knowledge of God as we experience His comfort, provision, and sustaining grace in ways we never would have known without the suffering.

### Reflect on these questions about the passages:

- ▶ What do these passages teach about what it means to have eternal life?
- ▶ What does it mean that eternal life is “knowing” God and Jesus Christ? How is this different from simply knowing about them?
- ▶ How does the promise of eternal life change how you view your present struggles?
- ▶ While “eternal life” begins now for those who believe, the current struggles and hardships often remain. How does knowing that eventually “in glory” all the pain and suffering will finally end bring you comfort today?
- ▶ Slowly pray through these verses again, thanking God for the gift of eternal life through Jesus.

# DAY 2: THE VISION OF LIFE WITHOUT TEARS

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read these passages about God's promise to end all suffering:

## JOHN 6:27

*Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.*

## REVELATION 21:4

*He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*

Jesus draws a powerful contrast between temporal things that perish and eternal realities that endure forever. In our suffering, we often become fixated on temporary circumstances—the diagnosis, the loss, the broken relationship, the financial crisis. While these are real and painful, Jesus invites us to lift our eyes to eternal realities. The “food that endures to eternal life” speaks to a satisfaction and fulfillment that transcends our earthly experiences.

The promise in Revelation 21:4 is breathtakingly comprehensive. God will wipe away every tear—not some tears, but every single one. This intimate image of God personally attending to our sorrow reveals His tender care for our emotional pain. He sees each tear we cry, and He promises that one day He will personally comfort us. There will be no more death—the ultimate enemy will be defeated. There will be no more mourning or crying or pain—the very sources of our deepest anguish will be eliminated.

The phrase “the old order of things has passed away” encompasses everything broken about our world—disease, injustice, betrayal, loss, disappointment, and death itself. In the new creation, these things will not be reformed or improved; they will be completely abolished. This promise doesn’t minimize our current pain but gives us hope that our suffering has an expiration date. The God who makes all things new will transform our sorrow into joy.

When we’re overwhelmed by present circumstances, this vision of our future helps us persevere. Just as a woman in labor focuses on the joy of holding her child rather than the pain of delivery, we can endure current hardships by fixing our hope on the glorious future God has promised. The temporary nature of our suffering, contrasted with the eternal nature of God’s comfort, gives us strength to continue when everything in us wants to give up.

### Reflect on these questions about the passages:

- ▶ What do these passages teach about what it means to have eternal life?
- ▶ What does it mean that eternal life is “knowing” God and Jesus Christ? How is this different from simply knowing about them?
- ▶ How does the promise of eternal life change how you view your present struggles?
- ▶ While “eternal life” begins now for those who believe, the current struggles and hardships often remain. How does knowing that eventually “in glory” all the pain and suffering will finally end bring you comfort today?
- ▶ Slowly pray through these verses again, thanking God for the gift of eternal life through Jesus.

# DAY 3: THE WEDDING FEAST OF THE LAMB

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read these passages about the joy that awaits God's people:

## REVELATION 19:7-9

*Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.*

## REVELATION 7:15-17

*Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

These passages paint a picture of ultimate joy and celebration—a wedding feast where God's people are united with Christ forever. The imagery of a wedding captures the intimacy, joy, and permanence of our future relationship with God. In ancient times, wedding feasts were the highlight of community life, often lasting for days. This metaphor tells us that our eternal life will not be a boring, static existence but a continuous celebration of love and joy.

Notice the beautiful promise that those who have suffered will be sheltered by God's very presence. The word "shelter" implies protection, covering, and safety. For those who have felt exposed to life's storms, beaten down by circumstances, or scorched by trials, this promise of divine shelter brings deep comfort. God Himself will be our covering, our protection, our safe place.

The promise addresses our most basic needs: "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst." These words would have been especially meaningful to the original readers who knew physical hunger and thirst, but they speak to us about every kind of need—emotional, spiritual, relational. Every longing, every unmet need, every aching emptiness will be permanently satisfied.

The image shifts from wedding to shepherding, showing us that the Lamb who was slain for us will be our eternal Shepherd. He will lead us to springs of living water—not stagnant pools but fresh, flowing springs of life. This shepherding care is personal and tender. The same Jesus who laid down His life for the sheep will eternally lead, guide, and provide for His flock. And once again, we see the promise that God will wipe away every tear from our eyes—such an important promise that it's repeated throughout Revelation.

**Reflect on these questions about the passages:**

- ▶ How does the promise of God swallowing up death and wiping away tears speak to the nature of eternal life?
- ▶ What aspects of God's care and provision are emphasized in this depiction of eternal life?
- ▶ How does this depiction of God's presence and care impact your understanding of and longing for eternal life in the midst of your difficulties?
- ▶ The imagery of a wedding feast and of God as a shepherd providing for every need - which image brings you more comfort today and why?
- ▶ What might it be like to be in God's presence where every need is met and every tear is wiped away? Rest in this promise for a few moments.

# DAY 4: PRESENT SUFFERING & FUTURE GLORY

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read these passages about the relationship between current trials and eternal glory:

## ROMANS 8:18

*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*

## 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18

*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

Paul, who endured beatings, imprisonment, shipwrecks, and constant danger for the gospel, makes an astounding claim: our present sufferings are not worth comparing with future glory. This isn't the statement of someone who lived a comfortable life minimizing others' pain. This is the testimony of someone intimately acquainted with suffering who had also caught a glimpse of glory so magnificent that it reframed everything.

The phrase "glory that will be revealed in us" suggests that this glory isn't just something we'll observe but something we'll participate in. God's glory will somehow be revealed in and through us. Our suffering isn't meaningless; it's preparing us for a glory that will make our worst trials seem insignificant by comparison.

Paul acknowledges a difficult reality: outwardly we are wasting away. Our bodies age, break down, and fail us. Diseases progress, strength diminishes, and death approaches. But simultaneously, something else is happening—inward renewal day by day. While our outer nature deteriorates, God is doing a work of transformation in our inner being. This renewal isn't sporadic or occasional; it's daily, constant, ongoing.

Perhaps most challenging is Paul's description of our troubles as "light and momentary." When you're in the midst of suffering, it feels anything but light or momentary. It feels crushing and eternal. But Paul is viewing our troubles from an eternal perspective. Compared to eternity, even a lifetime of suffering is momentary. Compared to the weight of eternal glory, even our heaviest burdens are light.

The key to enduring is found in the last verse: fixing our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen. The visible realities—the test results, the empty chair, the bills, the pain—these are temporary. The unseen realities—God’s presence, His promises, the coming glory—these are eternal and more real than what we can see with our eyes.

### Reflect on these questions about the passages:

- ▶ What is “the glory that will be revealed in us”? In what ways is this different than your current situation?
- ▶ How do these verses help you view present sufferings in light of future glory?
- ▶ What does it mean for the inward man to be renewed day by day even while outwardly wasting away?
- ▶ How do “light and momentary troubles” relate to an “eternal glory” that far outweighs them all? Does your suffering feel “light and momentary”?
- ▶ How does the temporal/eternal contrast in this passage inform your view of eternal life?
- ▶ What are some practical ways you can shift your focus from what is seen to what is unseen today?

# DAY 5: THE PROMISE OF GOD'S PRESENCE

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read these passages about God's promise to be with us:

## DEUTERONOMY 31:8

*The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.*

## JOSHUA 1:5

*No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.*

These promises were given at crucial transition points in Israel's history—Moses was about to die, and Joshua was about to lead the people into the Promised Land. God's people faced uncertainty, danger, and the temptation to fear. God's response to their anxiety was not to promise easy circumstances but to promise His presence.

Notice that God doesn't just promise to be with us; He promises to go before us. Like a scout checking the path ahead, like a bodyguard clearing the way, God goes into our future before we get there. Every challenge we will face, every difficulty that lies ahead, God has already seen and prepared for. We never walk into a situation where God hasn't already been.

The promise "I will never leave you nor forsake you" is stated in the strongest possible terms in the original language. It contains multiple negatives for emphasis, essentially saying, "I will never, no never, no never leave you or forsake you." This isn't a casual promise but a divine covenant commitment. God is binding Himself to us with unbreakable bonds.

For Joshua, this promise came with a specific context: "No one will be able to stand against you." This didn't mean Joshua would never face opposition—he would face many enemies. But it meant that with God's presence, he would ultimately prevail. In our own battles with illness, grief, depression, or difficult circumstances, we can claim this same promise. The enemies we face—whether physical, emotional, or spiritual—cannot ultimately defeat us because God is with us.

The command that follows the promise is significant: “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” Fear and discouragement are the natural human responses to overwhelming circumstances. But God’s presence changes everything. When we truly grasp that the Creator of the universe has promised to be with us always, fear loses its grip and discouragement lifts. The antidote to fear is not the absence of danger but the presence of God.

### Reflect on these questions about the passages:

- ▶ These passages reveal God’s promise not only to be with us, but also to go before us. How does the concept of God going ahead of you into your situations affect your perspective on the challenges you’re currently facing?
- ▶ Both verses were given in the context of significant leadership transitions in Israel. How might these assurances of God’s presence provide peace and confidence, especially in times of change and uncertainty?
- ▶ God promises to never leave or forsake his people. In what ways have you felt God’s presence during your suffering? In what ways have you struggled to sense his presence?
- ▶ The command “do not be afraid; do not be discouraged” follows the promise of God’s presence. How are fear/discouragement and awareness of God’s presence related?
- ▶ Take a few moments to meditate on the promise “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Let this truth sink deep into your heart.

# DAY 6: GOD'S WATCHFUL CARE

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read these passages about God's constant watchfulness over His people:

## PSALM 121:8

*The LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.*

## PSALM 118:6

*The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?*

## JEREMIAH 1:5, 8

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations...Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,' declares the LORD.*

The promise that God watches over our coming and going encompasses every movement, every transition, every journey we make. In ancient times, coming and going often involved danger—bandits on the roads, wild animals, treacherous paths. The psalmist declares that God's watchful care extends to all these vulnerable moments. But the promise extends beyond physical journeys to every transition in life—the coming and going of relationships, jobs, health, and seasons of life.

What makes this care even more remarkable is its duration: “both now and forevermore.” God’s protective watch is not limited to our earthly life but extends into eternity. There is never a moment—now or in eternity—when we are outside of God’s watchful care. This eternal perspective transforms how we view our current circumstances. The God who watches over us now will continue watching over us forever.

Psalm 118:6 reveals the practical outcome of knowing God is with us: fearlessness in the face of human opposition. The rhetorical question “What can mere mortals do to me?” doesn’t deny that humans can cause us harm—they can. But it puts human power in perspective. When the Lord of the universe is with us, human threats shrink to their proper size. Whatever people can do to us is temporary and limited; what God can do for us is eternal and unlimited.

The passage from Jeremiah adds another dimension to God’s presence—His intimate knowledge of us. Before Jeremiah existed, before he was even formed in the womb, God knew him. This isn’t mere

foreknowledge but intimate, personal knowledge. God didn't just know about Jeremiah; He knew Jeremiah. And based on this intimate knowledge, God set him apart for a specific purpose.

This same God who knew us before we were born continues to know us completely—every fear, every hurt, every struggle. And His message to us is the same as to Jeremiah: “Do not be afraid...for I am with you and will rescue you.” The promise of rescue doesn’t mean we won’t face difficulties, but it means God will be with us in them and will ultimately deliver us.

### Reflect on these questions about the passages:

- ▶ What feelings do these promises of God’s constant watchfulness evoke in you? What can change in your life when you internalize the fact that God is with you?
- ▶ How do these verses challenge your fears of human opposition or disapproval? How does this relate to your current circumstances?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that God knew you before you were born? How does this intimate knowledge affect your confidence in his presence with you now?
- ▶ God’s presence means we don’t need to fear. What specific fears in your life need to be addressed by the promise of God’s presence?
- ▶ Pray through these verses slowly, replacing “you” with “me” to make them personal declarations of God’s presence in your life.

# DAY 7: THE SPIRIT'S ABIDING PRESENCE

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read these passages about the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives:

## JOHN 14:1, 16, 18, 27A

*[Jesus said,] Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me...And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever...I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you...Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you...*

## ROMANS 8:14-17

*For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

Jesus speaks these words from John to His disciples on the night before His crucifixion, knowing they would soon face the trauma of His death. His first words address their emotional state: “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” Jesus acknowledges that they have a choice in how they respond to troubling circumstances. The antidote to a troubled heart is faith—believing in God and believing in Jesus.

The promise of the Spirit as “another advocate” is profound. The word means one who comes alongside to help, comfort, defend, and strengthen. Jesus had been this for the disciples during His earthly ministry. Now He promises that the Spirit will continue this role forever. Unlike Jesus’ physical presence which was limited by space and time, the Spirit’s presence is unlimited—He can be with all believers everywhere always.

“I will not leave you as orphans” touches our deepest fear—abandonment. Orphans in the ancient world were utterly vulnerable, without protection, provision, or identity. Jesus promises that we will never be spiritual orphans. Through the Spirit, we have constant access to divine presence, protection, and provision. We belong to God’s family.

Paul expands on this by explaining how the Spirit confirms our identity as God’s children. The Spirit doesn’t make us slaves who live in fear, constantly worried about God’s approval or rejection. Instead,

the Spirit brings us into the intimacy of family, enabling us to cry “Abba, Father”—the Aramaic term of endearment a child would use. If we are children, we are heirs. We share in Christ’s sufferings now, but we will also share in His glory. Our current sufferings are not evidence that God has abandoned us but proof that we belong to Him.

**Reflect on these questions about the passages:**

- ▶ How does Jesus’ promise to not leave us as orphans resonate with you?
- ▶ In these verses Jesus promises peace. Sometimes people think about peace as the absence of struggle or strife. What kind of peace do you think Jesus is referring to here?
- ▶ How does being led by the Spirit of God affirm our identity as God’s children?
- ▶ How does this shared sonship with Christ provide assurance of God’s abiding presence and love even in the midst of your difficulties?
- ▶ Spend time thanking God that you are not an orphan but his beloved child, and that his Spirit dwells within you.

# DAY 8: THE PROMISE OF CHARACTER GROWTH

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read these passages about how God uses trials to grow our character:

## JAMES 1:2-4

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

## JAMES 1:12

*Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.*

James opens with what seems like an impossible command: “Consider it pure joy...whenever you face trials of many kinds.” This isn’t asking us to pretend trials are pleasant or to deny our pain. The word “consider” means to evaluate, to think differently about something. James is asking us to reframe our perspective on trials based on their ultimate outcome.

The key to this joy is knowledge—“because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.” This isn’t theoretical knowledge but experiential understanding. When we understand that our trials are not random or meaningless but are producing something valuable in us, we can face them differently. The testing of faith is like the testing of gold in fire—it’s not meant to destroy but to purify and prove genuine.

Perseverance (or endurance) is the ability to remain faithful under pressure, to keep going when everything in us wants to quit. It’s a quality that can only be developed through trials. Just as physical muscles grow stronger through resistance training, our spiritual muscles of perseverance grow through the resistance of trials. Without trials, we would remain spiritually weak and immature.

But perseverance isn’t the end goal—it’s the means to a greater end. James says we should let perseverance “finish its work.” Like a master craftsman who won’t stop until the work is perfect, perseverance continues shaping us until we are “mature and complete, not lacking anything.” The Greek word for mature means fully developed, having reached the intended goal. Through trials, God is developing us into the people He created us to be.

The promise in verse 12 adds eternal perspective to our temporal trials. Those who persevere under trial are “blessed”—not because trials are enjoyable but because of what they produce and where they lead. The crown of life awaits those who endure. This crown is not earned by our endurance but is the gracious reward God gives to those who love Him and remain faithful through trials.

### Reflect on these questions about the passages:

- ▶ James starts by encouraging us to “consider it pure joy... whenever you face trials of many kinds”. This might seem like an unusual or even unrealistic response to trials. What might be some practical ways we can apply this command in our own lives?
- ▶ How does recognizing the value of trials in testing our faith help us shift our perspective towards joy?
- ▶ Verse 3 states “the testing of your faith produces perseverance.” How have you seen this principle at work in your own life or the lives of others?
- ▶ What does God promise for those who persevere? What does this mean practically?
- ▶ Both of these verses from the book of James refer to perseverance. Why is perseverance important in the context of suffering?

# DAY 9: STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read this passage about God's power displayed in our weakness:

## 2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-10

*But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.*

The image of treasure in jars of clay would have been immediately understood by Paul's original readers. Clay jars were common, cheap, fragile containers used for everyday purposes. They were easily broken and had no value in themselves. Yet Paul says we carry the invaluable treasure of the gospel in these fragile containers. This is by God's design—to show that the extraordinary power belongs to God, not to us.

Our human frailty—our susceptibility to illness, emotional distress, weakness, and death—is not a design flaw. It's the very means by which God's power is most clearly displayed. When a weak, broken person exhibits supernatural peace, joy, and perseverance, it's obvious that something beyond human strength is at work. Our weakness becomes the canvas on which God paints His strength.

Paul then provides four powerful contrasts that describe the Christian experience in suffering. We are “hard pressed on every side, but not crushed.” The image is of being under tremendous pressure that would normally destroy, yet somehow remaining intact. “Perplexed, but not in despair”—we may not understand why we're suffering or how God will resolve our situation, but we don't lose hope. “Persecuted, but not abandoned”—others may turn against us, but God never leaves us. “Struck down, but not destroyed”—we may be knocked down repeatedly, but we're never knocked out permanently.

These contrasts reveal that Christians are not exempt from suffering—we are hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down. But we are also not defeated by suffering. There's always a “but not” in our story. This isn't due to our own resilience but to God's preserving power. We survive what should destroy us because God's power is at work in our weakness.

The most profound statement comes in verse 10: “We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.” Our sufferings connect us to Christ’s sufferings. As we experience various forms of death—death of dreams, death of health, death of relationships—we participate in Christ’s death. But this participation in His death leads to a revelation of His life.

### Reflect on these questions about the passages:

- ▶ What does Paul mean by the image of “jars of clay”? How does it relate to our human condition, particularly during times of hardship?
- ▶ Paul uses several contrasts: “hard pressed but not crushed”, “perplexed, but not in despair”, “persecuted, but not abandoned”, “struck down, but not destroyed”. How do these contrasts reflect your own experience of suffering?
- ▶ What does it mean to carry around in our body the death of Jesus, and how can this lead to the revealing of the life of Jesus in us?
- ▶ What does growth look like according to these verses?
- ▶ According to these verses, why is it that we are able to persevere? What does this look like for you in your current circumstances?

# DAY 10: THE HARVEST OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read these passages about how God uses discipline to produce righteousness:

## HEBREWS 12:11

*No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*

## 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18

*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

The writer of Hebrews begins with refreshing honesty: “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful.” There’s no attempt to minimize or spiritualize away the reality of pain. Discipline—whether it’s God’s direct correction or His allowing difficult circumstances to shape us—hurts. This acknowledgment is important because it validates our experience. When we’re suffering, it doesn’t feel pleasant, and we’re not expected to pretend it does.

But the passage doesn’t stop with the pain. There’s a “however” that changes everything. This painful discipline “produces a harvest of righteousness and peace.” The agricultural metaphor is significant. A harvest doesn’t happen immediately after planting. There’s a long growing season where nothing seems to be happening. The seed is buried in dark soil, invisible to the eye. But beneath the surface, transformation is occurring. Similarly, the work God does in us through trials often happens below the surface, invisible to us and others, until eventually the harvest appears.

The harvest is twofold: righteousness and peace. Righteousness refers to right living, right character, right relationships with God and others. It’s the practical outworking of godly character in daily life. Peace is the inner tranquility that comes from being rightly aligned with God and His purposes. These two qualities—righteousness and peace—are exactly what we need most but cannot manufacture on our own. They must be produced in us, and God uses discipline as His tool.

Notice the condition: “for those who have been trained by it.” Not everyone who experiences discipline receives its benefits. We must allow ourselves to be trained. The Greek word suggests athletic training—repeated exercises that develop strength and skill. Just as an athlete submits to a trainer’s regimen, trusting the process even when it’s painful, we must submit to God’s training through trials. Paul adds that while our outer nature wastes away, inwardly we are being renewed daily. Our troubles are achieving an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

### Reflect on these questions about the passages:

- ▶ How does the concept of discipline relate to suffering in Hebrews 12:11?
  
  
  
- ▶ In what ways have you seen pain lead to growth and the development of righteousness in your life?
  
  
  
- ▶ How might suffering train us and produce a “harvest of righteousness and peace”?
  
  
  
- ▶ What contrast does Paul set up between the “outward” and the “inward”? How does this relate to your current circumstances?
  
  
  
- ▶ In what ways have you experienced inward renewal even while facing outward hardships?
  
  
  
- ▶ Consider ways God has grown your spiritual “muscles” through your times of suffering and challenge.

# DAY 11: THE PROMISE TO BRING GOOD

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read these passages about God's promise to work all things for good:

## **ROMANS 8:28**

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

## **PHILIPPIANS 1:4-6**

*In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

Romans 8:28 is perhaps one of the most quoted yet most difficult promises in Scripture. Paul begins with certainty: "And we know." This isn't wishful thinking or blind optimism but settled conviction based on God's character and track record. What we know is comprehensive: "in all things God works for the good." Not some things, not most things, but all things. This includes the things that seem entirely evil, completely senseless, utterly destructive. God is so sovereign, so wise, so powerful that He can take even the worst things and weave them into His good purposes.

It's crucial to understand what this verse doesn't say. It doesn't say all things are good—they're not. Cancer isn't good. Abuse isn't good. Death isn't good. These things are results of living in a fallen, broken world. But God is able to work even these terrible things for good. It also doesn't say all things will feel good or look good in the moment. Often, we can't see how anything good could come from our suffering. But God sees from an eternal perspective and works on an eternal timeline.

The promise is specifically for "those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." This isn't a blanket promise that everything works out for everyone. It's a covenant promise for God's people. Our love for God and His calling on our lives means we're caught up in His purposes. Our individual stories are part of His grand narrative, and He ensures that every chapter—even the dark ones—ultimately contributes to His good purposes.

Paul's words to the Philippians add another dimension to this promise. God doesn't just work all things for good; He commits to completing what He starts. The good work God began in us at salvation will be brought to completion. This is God's commitment, not dependent on our performance or circumstances. Through every season of life, in triumph and tragedy, God continues His work in us until the day of Christ Jesus.

### Reflect on these questions about the passages:

- ▶ How does the promise that "in all things God works for the good" encourage you in times of difficulty or uncertainty?
- ▶ What does it mean to you personally that God has called you according to his purpose?
- ▶ How have you experienced God's ongoing work in your life since you first believed?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that God will carry his good work in you to completion, even through twists and turns in the road?
- ▶ The promise is not that all things are good, but that God works all things for good. How does this distinction help you process your suffering?

# DAY 12: JOY AFTER SORROW

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read these passages about God's promise to turn sorrow into joy:

## JOHN 16:20-22

*Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.*

## GENESIS 50:20

*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*

Jesus speaks these words in John to His disciples on the night before His crucifixion, preparing them for the trauma ahead. He doesn't sugarcoat the reality—they will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. There will be a time when it seems like evil has won, when God's purposes appear to have failed, when darkness seems to triumph over light. This is the reality of living in a fallen world. Sometimes the wicked prosper while the righteous suffer. Sometimes those who oppose God seem to be winning while God's people are weeping.

But Jesus makes a profound promise: "your grief will turn to joy." Not your grief will be replaced by joy, or followed by joy, but will be transformed into joy. The very thing causing grief will become a source of joy. This seems impossible from our human perspective, but it's the pattern of God's redemptive work. He doesn't just remove suffering; He transforms it.

The childbirth analogy is perfect. Labor pain is intense, overwhelming, and seems unbearable in the moment. But it's purposeful pain—it's bringing forth life. And when the child is born, the mother doesn't just experience relief from pain; she experiences a joy that makes her forget the anguish. The pain was the pathway to joy. Similarly, our current grief is not meaningless suffering but birth pangs of coming joy. The permanence of this joy is remarkable: "no one will take away your joy." The joy Jesus promises isn't dependent on circumstances that can change. It's rooted in eternal realities that cannot be shaken.

Joseph's story provides a concrete example of this principle. His brothers' betrayal, his slavery in Egypt, his unjust imprisonment—all were genuine evils intended to harm him. Yet God was working through even their evil intentions to accomplish His good purposes. What was intended for harm became the means of saving many lives. God can take the worst thing that happens to us and weave it into His plan for good.

### Reflect on these questions about the passages:

- ▶ Can you identify moments of grief in your life that were turned into joy?
- ▶ How can this promise of joy after mourning influence your perspective on current challenges?
- ▶ The story of Joseph shows that the “good” God intended was not just for Joseph, but through Joseph for his family and community. How does this help you understand the kinds of purposes God has for our suffering?
- ▶ Can you identify a situation in your life where God used something intended for harm for good?
- ▶ Jesus uses the image of childbirth—intense pain followed by overwhelming joy. How does this metaphor help you understand your current suffering?

# DAY 13: GOD'S GOOD PLANS

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read this passage about God's plans for our welfare:

## JEREMIAH 29:11-13

*'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.' Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*

This beloved promise was given to people in exile—torn from their homeland, living as captives in a foreign land, wondering if God had abandoned them. They had lost everything familiar: their temple, their land, their freedom, their sense of identity. It was into this context of profound loss and dislocation that God spoke these words of hope.

God begins with His omniscience: "I know the plans I have for you." While the exiles felt like their lives were spinning out of control, subject to the whims of their captors, God declares that He has plans. Their circumstances weren't random or outside His sovereignty. He had not lost track of them in Babylon. He knew exactly where they were and what He intended to do.

The nature of these plans is crucial: "plans to prosper you and not to harm you." The Hebrew word for prosper is "shalom"—meaning wholeness, completeness, welfare. God's plans are for their comprehensive well-being, not just material prosperity. This is particularly striking given their circumstances. They were in exile because of their sin, yet God's plans for them were still good. His discipline had a purpose, but it wouldn't last forever. He intended to restore and bless them.

"Plans to give you hope and a future"—in exile, both seemed impossible. Hope requires something to look forward to, and they could see only captivity. A future seemed cut off, their national story apparently ended. But God promises both. He has already written future chapters to their story, and they are chapters of restoration, not destruction.

The promise continues with an invitation to relationship: "Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you." Their exile hadn't cut them off from God's ears. He was still listening, still accessible. Prayer wasn't futile even in Babylon. The culmination is beautiful: "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." God doesn't hide from those who earnestly seek Him. The exile, painful as it was, would create in them a desperation for God they hadn't previously possessed. Our trials aren't interruptions to God's good plans but often the means by which He accomplishes them.

### Reflect on these questions about the passages:

- ▶ How does God's care for your welfare inspire hope and confidence in your future?
- ▶ In what ways have you seen God's plans unfold for your welfare and not for evil in your life?
- ▶ According to these verses, how can we collaborate with God in achieving his purposes?
- ▶ This promise was given to people in exile, experiencing hardship. How does knowing the context affect how you receive this promise?
- ▶ God promises both to have good plans AND to listen when we pray. How are these two promises connected?
- ▶ What does it mean to seek God with all your heart during a time of suffering?

# DAY 14: THE PROMISE TO ANSWER PRAYER

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read these passages about God's promise to hear our prayers:

## PSALM 116:1-2

*I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; He heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.*

## ISAIAH 38:5

*Go and tell Hezekiah, This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life.*

The psalmist begins with a declaration of love rooted in experience: "I love the Lord, for he heard my voice." This isn't theoretical theology but personal testimony. The psalmist has cried out to God in desperation and discovered that God really listens. This experience of being heard transforms duty into delight, obligation into affection. We love God not just because we're commanded to, but because we've experienced His attentive care.

Notice the intimacy of the language: God "heard my voice" and "turned his ear to me." Like a parent bending down to listen to a child, God inclines Himself toward us when we pray. He's not a distant deity who might occasionally notice our prayers. He actively turns His attention to us, listening not just to our words but to the cry of our hearts.

The psalmist's response is commitment: "I will call on him as long as I live." Having experienced God's attentiveness once, he's determined to keep praying. This isn't a bargaining chip—"I'll keep praying if you keep answering." It's the natural response of someone who has discovered a God who truly listens. Why would we stop talking to Someone who cares enough to listen to every word?

The story of Hezekiah provides a concrete example of God's responsiveness to prayer. Facing terminal illness, Hezekiah poured out his heart to God. God's response through Isaiah is remarkably personal: "I have heard your prayer and seen your tears." God doesn't just hear our words; He sees our tears. Every tear that falls from our eyes is noticed by the God of the universe.

God's response to Hezekiah shows that our prayers can actually change outcomes. This is one of the great mysteries of prayer—the sovereign God who knows the end from the beginning still responds to our prayers. He invites us to participate through prayer in the unfolding of His purposes. Hezekiah's prayer added fifteen years to his life. His story reminds us that no situation is too desperate for prayer. The God who heard prayers in the past still hears prayers today.

### Reflect on these questions about the passages:

- ▶ Part of our ability to love God grows out of discovering that he really knows us, and out of that knowledge his response is love and compassion. How does knowing God hears your prayers affect your love for him?
- ▶ The story of Hezekiah shows that our prayers matter to God and can even change outcomes. How does this encourage you to persist in prayer?
- ▶ God not only hears our prayers but sees our tears. What does it mean to you that God notices and cares about your emotional pain?
- ▶ Have you experienced times when you were certain God heard your prayers? What was that like?
- ▶ Spend time telling God exactly how you feel, knowing that he hears every word and sees every tear.

# DAY 15: NEAR TO ALL WHO CALL

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read these passages about God's nearness to those who call on Him:

## PSALM 145:18-19

*The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; He hears their cry and saves them.*

## LAMENTATIONS 3:55-58

*I called on your name, LORD, from the depths of the pit. You heard my plea: "Do not close your ears to my cry for relief." You came near when I called you, and you said, "Do not fear." You, Lord, took up my case; you redeemed my life.*

The promise that “The LORD is near to all who call on him” is both simple and profound. Nearness speaks of accessibility, intimacy, and readiness to help. The God who created galaxies and governs nations makes Himself available to anyone who calls. There are no qualifications listed—no requirement of perfection, no minimum level of faith, no preset formula. The only condition is that we call on Him “in truth”—with sincerity and genuineness, not pretense or manipulation.

This nearness is universal: “all who call on him.” It doesn’t matter if you’re a spiritual giant or a struggling believer, a longtime saint or a desperate sinner. Social status, past failures, present struggles—none of these create barriers to God’s nearness. The moment we genuinely call, He is near. This level of access to God is revolutionary. No priest, no temple, no ritual is required—just a sincere cry from the heart.

The promise continues: “He fulfills the desires of those who fear him.” This might seem contradictory—if God fulfills our desires, why do prayers seem unanswered? The key is understanding that fearing God transforms our desires. As we grow in reverence for God, our desires align increasingly with His will. We begin to want what He wants. The deepest desires of those who fear God—for His glory, His kingdom, His righteousness—these He delights to fulfill.

The passage from Lamentations takes us into the depths of human suffering. The writer is calling “from the depths of the pit”—a metaphor for the lowest, darkest, most hopeless situation imaginable. Yet even

from there, his cry reaches God's ears. There is no depth of suffering so profound that our prayers cannot reach God. God's response is multi-faceted: He comes near, He speaks comfort ("Do not fear"), and He takes action ("took up my case; you redeemed my life"). God doesn't just sympathize from a distance. He actively intervenes, becoming our advocate, working redemption even in our worst circumstances. The progression is important: we call, God hears, He comes near, He speaks, He acts.

### Reflect on these questions about the passages:

- ▶ How does the promise that "The Lord is near to all who call on him" comfort or encourage you in your prayer life?
- ▶ What does it mean that God fulfills the desires of those who fear him? If this is God's promise, why does it sometimes seem that our desires are not fulfilled?
- ▶ Sometimes the things we desire are actually reflections of deeper, more foundational desires. How does this help us understand God's response to our prayers?
- ▶ The writer of Lamentations was in "the depths of the pit" when he called on God. Have you ever prayed from a place of deep desperation? How did God respond?
- ▶ Notice that God's response includes both action ("took up my case") and comfort ("Do not fear"). Which do you need more from God today?

# DAY 16: GOD HEARS OUR WEEPING

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read these passages about God's response to our desperate cries:

## PSALM 30:2-3

*Lord my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me. You, Lord, brought me up from the realm of the dead; you spared me from going down to the pit.*

## PSALM 6:8-9

*Away from me, all you who do evil, for the Lord has heard my weeping. The Lord has heard my cry for mercy; the Lord accepts my prayer.*

## JONAH 2:1-2

*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 deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry.'*

These passages represent prayers from the edge of death, the depths of despair, and the consequences of rebellion. Yet in each case, God heard and responded. David's testimony in Psalm 30 is one of complete deliverance: "I called to you for help, and you healed me." The healing was so complete that David describes it as being brought up from the realm of the dead. He was at death's door, perhaps literally, and God intervened.

This isn't just physical healing but total restoration. To be spared from "going down to the pit" in Hebrew thought meant more than avoiding death—it meant being rescued from the realm of hopelessness, meaninglessness, and separation from God. David's prayer brought him back from the brink of total despair to renewed life and hope.

Psalm 6 reveals the emotional intensity of David's prayer: God heard his "weeping." This wasn't composed, formal prayer but the desperate sobbing of a broken heart. Sometimes our prayers have no words, only tears. Sometimes the only prayer we can manage is the inarticulate cry of pain. God hears these prayers too. In fact, He may hear them most clearly of all.

David's confidence is so strong that he can command evil to depart: "Away from me, all you who do evil, for the Lord has heard my weeping." The certainty that God has heard transforms David from victim to victor. The triple affirmation is powerful: "The Lord has heard my weeping. The Lord has heard my cry for mercy; the Lord accepts my prayer." Each statement builds—God not only heard the weeping and the cry, He accepts the prayer.

Jonah's prayer comes from the most unusual prayer closet—the belly of a great fish. More significantly, Jonah is there because of his own rebellion. By any measure, he forfeited the right to expect God to hear his prayers. Yet even from inside the fish, a living symbol of God's judgment, Jonah could pray and be heard. No situation is too desperate for prayer, no location too remote, no circumstance too bizarre.

### Reflect on these questions about the passages:

- ▶ What kinds of desperate situations are represented in these passages?
  
- ▶ What responses do these biblical authors have to God after he responds to their prayers? Have you felt similarly when God responds to your prayers?
  
- ▶ Notice the confidence these writers have that God hears and responds. Where does such confidence come from?
  
- ▶ Even Jonah, in the belly of a fish due to his own disobedience, could cry out to God and be heard. What does this tell you about God's willingness to hear our prayers?
  
- ▶ Can you recall a time when God clearly responded to your prayers? Thank him for that time.

# DAY 17: THE PROMISE TO PRESERVE US

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read these passages about God's preserving power:

## PSALM 121:7-8

*The Lord will keep you from all harm—He will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.*

## PSALM 3:1-6

*LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! Many are saying of me, “God will not deliver him.” But you, LORD, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high. I call out to the LORD, and he answers me from his holy mountain. I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me. I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side.*

Psalm 121 makes a sweeping promise: “The Lord will keep you from all harm.” This might seem contradictory to our experience—believers do experience harm. The key is understanding that the ultimate harm from which God preserves us is spiritual harm, eternal harm. While we may experience physical suffering, God preserves our souls. While we may face temporal losses, God preserves our eternal inheritance. The harm that matters most—separation from God, spiritual death, eternal judgment—from this we are completely preserved.

The promise extends to watching over our entire life. Not just the “spiritual” parts, but our whole existence is under God’s watchful care. He watches over our “coming and going”—a Hebrew expression encompassing all of life’s activities. Whether we’re at work or worship, in public or private, awake or asleep, we’re under divine surveillance. But this isn’t the surveillance of a suspicious authority; it’s the watchful care of a loving Father. The duration of this preservation is crucial: “both now and forevermore.” God’s preserving power isn’t limited to this life but extends into eternity.

David’s testimony in Psalm 3 provides a concrete example of divine preservation. Written when David fled from his son Absalom’s rebellion, it reveals preservation in the midst of overwhelming opposition. David doesn’t minimize the threat—he’s vastly outnumbered by enemies who want him dead. Adding to the physical danger is psychological warfare: “Many are saying of me, ‘God will not deliver him.’” His enemies aren’t just attacking his body but his faith.

David's response reveals the secret of preservation: "But you, LORD, are a shield around me." Not a shield in front of him, but around him—360-degree protection. The proof of God's preservation is profound: "I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me." Sleep is the ultimate act of vulnerability. Yet David could sleep soundly while surrounded by enemies because he knew God was sustaining him. Every morning he woke was proof of God's preserving power.

### Reflect on these questions about the passages:

- ▶ In Psalm 3, David describes lying down to sleep even in the midst of his enemies. He knows that God will sustain him. How does God's preserving power help you rest even in difficult circumstances?
- ▶ The promise in Psalm 121 is comprehensive - God watches over your whole life, your coming and going, now and forevermore. How does this totality of God's preservation encourage you?
- ▶ What does it mean that God is a "shield around" you? How is this different from God removing all difficulties?
- ▶ David could sleep peacefully even when surrounded by enemies because he trusted in God's protection. What keeps you awake at night? How might trust in God's preserving power help you rest?

# DAY 18: PROTECTED BY GOD

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read these passages about God's protective power:

## PSALM 91:14-15

*Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.*

## PSALM 46:1-3

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.*

In Psalm 91, we hear God's voice directly, making promises to those who love Him. The condition is relationship: "Because he loves me." This isn't about earning God's protection through our love but about the privileges that come from being in a love relationship with God. Those who love God have access to resources and promises unavailable to those who remain distant from Him.

God makes seven distinct promises here: rescue, protection, answered prayer, divine presence in trouble, deliverance, honor, and (in the following verse) satisfaction with long life. Notice that several of these promises assume we will face trouble. God doesn't promise to eliminate all problems but to be with us in them and ultimately deliver us from them.

"I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name." In Hebrew thought, a name represented the entire character and nature of a person. To acknowledge God's name means to recognize who He truly is—His power, wisdom, love, and faithfulness. This acknowledgment isn't just intellectual but practical trust that affects how we live.

The promise "I will be with him in trouble" is perhaps the most precious. God doesn't always deliver us from trouble immediately, but He promises never to leave us alone in it. His presence in our trouble transforms it. What we cannot bear alone becomes bearable with Him. What would destroy us alone becomes an opportunity for deeper intimacy with Him.

Psalm 46 presents God as our refuge—a place of safety we can run to when danger threatens. But He's not just a passive hiding place; He's also our strength—actively empowering us to face what we must face. The combination is perfect: when we need to escape, He's our refuge; when we need to engage, He's our strength. The psalm then presents a worst-case scenario: the earth giving way, mountains falling into the sea. Yet even if such cosmic catastrophe occurred, "we will not fear." Our security isn't in the stability of creation but in the Creator Himself.

### Reflect on these questions about the passages:

- ▶ What promises from God are reflected in these passages? Can you recall a time when you experienced these promises in your life?
  
- ▶ These passages use striking imagery to illustrate dangers - mountains falling, waters roaring. Which of these images resonates with your current circumstances? Why?
  
- ▶ Notice that God promises to be "with us in trouble" not to remove all trouble. How does this distinction affect your expectations of God?
  
- ▶ God is described as a refuge and strength. Which do you need more today - a place of safety (refuge) or power to continue (strength)?
  
- ▶ Even if the worst happens ("though the earth give way"), God remains our refuge. How does this ultimate security affect your ability to face your current challenges?

# DAY 19: THROUGH THE WATERS AND FIRE

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read these passages about God's presence in our trials:

## ISAIAH 43:2

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.*

## 1 CORINTHIANS 1:8-9

*He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

## 1 PETER 2:23

*When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*

Isaiah's prophecy uses two powerful metaphors for trials: waters and fire. Both were terrifying realities in the ancient world. Rivers could suddenly flood, sweeping away everything in their path. Fire could consume homes and cities with no way to stop it. These images represent overwhelming circumstances that threaten to destroy us—illness that threatens to drown us, trials that threaten to consume us.

Notice God says “when” not “if” you pass through waters and fire. This isn’t pessimism but realism. In this fallen world, we will face overwhelming circumstances. Following God doesn’t exempt us from trials but equips us to face them differently. The promise isn’t avoidance but accompaniment: “I will be with you.”

The promise concerning waters is specific: “they will not sweep over you.” You may be in the flood, the current may be strong, you may struggle to keep your footing, but you won’t be swept away. The waters may be terrifying, but they won’t have the final victory. God’s presence acts as an anchor, keeping us from being carried away by overwhelming circumstances.

Similarly with fire: “you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.” This doesn’t mean the fire won’t be hot or that we won’t feel its heat. But it means the fire won’t consume us. We think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace—they were definitely in the fire, but they emerged without even the smell of smoke. God’s presence made the difference.

Paul's promise addresses spiritual preservation: "He will keep you firm to the end... God is faithful." Our preservation doesn't depend on our faithfulness but His. Peter points us to Jesus as the ultimate example—when suffering unjustly, "he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." This is the key to enduring suffering: entrusting ourselves to God's just judgment rather than trying to vindicate ourselves.

### Reflect on these questions about the passages:

- ▶ Notice that Isaiah says "when" not "if" you pass through waters and fire. What does this tell us about God's approach to our suffering?
- ▶ How does God's faithfulness reassure you in times of hardship?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that God will keep you firm until the end?
- ▶ Jesus provides an example of entrusting himself to God during suffering. What would it look like for you to entrust your suffering to God?
- ▶ God promises his presence in the waters and fire, not removal of them. How does his presence make a difference in your trials?

# DAY 20: NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and prayerfully read this passage about the inseparable love of God:

## ROMANS 8:31-39

*What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

This magnificent passage is the crescendo of Paul's argument about the security of God's people. He begins with the foundational truth: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" This doesn't mean we have no opponents—Paul himself faced many. But it means that with God on our side, no opposition can ultimately succeed. The Creator of the universe, the all-powerful, all-wise, eternal God is for us. This changes everything.

Paul then presents the ultimate proof of God being for us: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all." If God was willing to give His most precious possession, His beloved Son, will He withhold lesser things? The cross is the guarantee that God will provide everything we need. The costliest gift has already been given; everything else is minor by comparison.

"Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." Our security rests on four unshakeable facts: Christ died for our sins, He rose to validate His victory, He reigns at God's right hand, and He continually intercedes for us. Right now, at this moment, Jesus is speaking to the Father on your behalf.

Paul then lists potential separators: trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword. These aren't theoretical threats—Paul experienced all of them. Yet none could separate him from Christ's love. "In all these things we are more than conquerors"—not after these things, but in them. We don't just survive our trials; we triumph through them.

The final list is comprehensive language trying to communicate the absolute impossibility of separation from God's love. This is our ultimate security. Your circumstances may change, but God's love never does. You are secure not because of your grip on God but because of His grip on you.

### Reflect on these questions about the passages:

- ▶ This passage brings up many dangers that can threaten us. What is Paul's response to these dangers?
  
- ▶ In the middle of this passage, Paul discusses the role of Christ Jesus in interceding for us and the impossibility of being separated from His love. How does knowing Jesus intercedes for you affect your perseverance in trials?
  
- ▶ Paul lists many things that cannot separate us from God's love - trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, danger, sword. Which of these (or others) have you feared might separate you from God?
  
- ▶ What does it mean to be "more than conquerors"? How is this different from simply surviving?
  
- ▶ Take time to slowly read through Paul's list of things that cannot separate you from God's love. Let this truth sink deep into your heart. No matter what you face, God's love remains.
  
- ▶ As you complete these 20 days of reflecting on God's promises, which promise has been most meaningful to you? How has God met you in these devotions? Take time to thank him for his faithfulness to all his promises.

## WHO ARE WE?

**Elizabeth Lewis Hall (Ph.D., Clinical Psychology)** is Professor at Rosemead School of Psychology, Biola University. Liz has been writing on suffering using psychology and Christian theology for 20 years. She has published over 100 academic articles and book chapters. With her husband, Todd Hall, she is the co-author of *Relational Spirituality: A Psychological-Theological Paradigm for Transformation*. Her contributions to the integration of psychology and theology have been recognized in various ways, including the Christian Association for Psychological Studies 2016 Narramore Award for Excellence in the Integration of Theology and Psychology. She teaches regularly for her adult Sunday School class.



**Kelly M. Kapic (Ph.D., Systematic and Historical Theology)** is Professor of Theological Studies at Covenant College where he has taught since 2001. Kelly has written or edited over fifteen books, including *Embodied Hope: A Theological Meditation on Pain and Suffering*, which won the Christianity Today book of the year award in the area of Theology and Ethics and World Magazine's Short List award for Accessible Theology Book of the year. In 2014 Kapic received a Templeton Grant to be part of The Center for Christian Thought studying the topic of Psychology and Spiritual Formation. He also served as part of the Core Research Team for the Templeton funded Project Amazing Grace.



**Jason McMartin (Ph.D., Religion)** is Professor of Theology at Biola University, where he holds a joint appointment at Rosemead School of Psychology and Talbot School of Theology. Jason has co-authored several articles and a book chapter on the role of suffering within the flourishing life. He also writes on virtue, spiritual formation, and theological anthropology, and teaches courses on integrating psychology and theology. He has served as a pastor and urban missionary.



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