

LIGHT



*Life Lessons
From the Psalms*

CONTENTS

- 3 Editorial: Blessed Peace
- 7 God's Providence
- 14 Refined Through Fire, Transformed by Hope
- 22 Puzzle: Singing With Grace
- 25 Praying for Others
- 33 Processing Anger
- 40 The Path of Praise

LIGHT

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Assistant Editor: Richard Clark Jr.
Layout & Design: Taumi Hartnell

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Contact us at 402.488.0981 or
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125
YEARS
CHRISTIAN RECORD
— SERVICES FOR THE BLIND —

Editorial:

Blessed Peace

by Jeri Lyn Rogge



The summer before my junior year of high school was a mix of emotional and literal peaks and valleys. A spiritual decision led to a battle of wills — and won'ts. Vacationing

in Colorado introduced this flatlander to mountains and core memories. And then there was life as a 16-year-old. That's chaos-a-plenty.

Anything that could change in my life did that summer. I was not emerging gracefully like a butterfly from its chrysalis. It was more like witnessing an elephant giving birth: a fall from several feet with a slime-covered landing followed by urgent orders to "get up, adapt, move!"

My mother, sisters, and I studied the Bible with a small country church and decided to be baptized together. I think we nearly doubled the church membership that day, and it was a beautiful moment I'll always cherish.

The whiplash reaction from well-meaning but misinformed relatives came a few months later in the form of a "Dear Jeri Lyn" letter. Essentially, their message was, "We're glad you're a Christian now but so very disappointed about how you got there." My stomach hit the floor as I read their admonition, tears splashing on the pages.

In the weeks before this "letter of great disappointment" arrived in my mailbox, I was on the road with my mom, stepdad, and sisters for an end-of-summer adventure in Colorado. Part of the trip included visiting relatives in the Denver area, and thankfully, their kids were around the same age as us girls. One of the

daughters, Mandy, invited me to hang out with her in a loft she'd recently converted into her bedroom. And as teenagers are prone to do, we talked about music.

As a new Christian, I hesitated to share the kind of music I previously gravitated toward — loud, gritty, and rebellious, without a whisp of God anywhere in the tunes or lyrics. In hindsight, I'm ashamed I allowed that music into my head.

A friend invited me to join another denomination's youth group about a year earlier. I wasn't interested in attending their church services. Still, this group included several schoolmates, and hanging out with them was a better option than some of the decisions I'd been making.

One of the field trips we enjoyed was to Wichita for a youth rally, where I heard a contemporary Christian music artist for the first time. This concept crashed my brain. All I knew about Christian music was worn-out hymns played on an off-key piano at church. This musician boldly proclaimed his love for Jesus as he played an up-tempo version of a hymn — of all things!

Where can I find more music like this?
My summer visit with Mandy proved very helpful, inspiring me to study the Bible more intentionally.

As Mandy and I chatted, she pulled out a tray of cassettes, selected a tape, slid it into her boombox, and pressed “play.” Calming music tumbled out, and the soothing low-alto voice of contemporary Christian artist Kim Hill delivered the words of Psalm 1. I wept, overwhelmed by the beauty of the song and the incredible peace that flooded my heart. Mandy quickly stopped the player.

“Are you OK?”

“Yes,” I sniffed. “I never thought about the Psalms as songs before.” She resumed the music, and it’s a profoundly cherished memory, partly because of this song but also for the gentle invitation offered in Psalm 1: “Blessed is he.” I wanted to be a happy, grounded student of the Lord like this person! Reading the Psalms then brought blessed peace to my anxious heart. Even today, the Lord continues to lovingly instruct me through its verses.

If you’ve never read the Psalms, I invite you to start at the beginning and let the words, emotions, and life lessons educate, inform, and bless you. Through reading the Psalms, may you become like a Psalm 1 tree, “planted by flowing streams” (Psalm 1:3, NET Bible), rooted, watered, flourishing, and secure.

Jeri Lyn Rogge is the director of Editorial and Outreach Ministries at Christian Record Services.

God’s Providence

by Allison Wilson Lee

I remember the day I felt I’d achieved Super Mom status — and lost it just as quickly. Preparing for an afternoon play date, I bathed my toddler and baby. I grabbed my shoes and house key and snuggled my boys into our double stroller. We left the house and ambled along. Everybody was in a good mood, and the weather was pleasant. I provided my boys with nature and fresh air. I got exercise. We even arrived on time! Then, once we’d

settled in at Dawn's home, I noticed the single detail that had slipped my mind: the diaper bag. I'd forgotten it and didn't have a single diaper on hand. As it so happened, I really needed the diaper bag! Thankfully, I was surrounded by other moms who readily shared diapers with me. I didn't accomplish Super Mom-level parenting, but my baby's needs were met thanks to help from others.

God's providence sometimes shows up that way — through the support of His people. Psalm 103:19 says, "The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all" (NASB). He reigns over the universe, not only having created it and setting it in motion but also ruling over it and holding it together. God also cares about the details of our often-messy human lives; all our days are written in His book before one of them even takes place (Psalm 139:16). He provides for our needs, big and small. During our play date that afternoon, the Lord offered His provision through loving friends.

Decades earlier, I experienced a need equally mundane but just as important. Then, too, I received God's care through Christlike friends who shared with me.

COLD WEATHER, WARM HEARTS

The icy rain poured on us as we gathered in

the parking lot outside my college dorm. A few of the men in our group threw our suitcases into car trunks at random to keep them out of the rain. Our campus ministry was headed to Daytona Beach, Florida, for a Christian conference during spring break. However, the weather felt anything but spring-like.

That night, our caravan of cars headed to Tallahassee, Florida, where we slept at a church. The next day, we traveled to Daytona Beach. When we arrived at the church, we piled out with the overnight bags we'd packed for the night's stay. We noticed the dusting of snowflakes coming down but had no clue we were approaching the ice storm of March 1993.

The next day, we drove down Daytona Beach's streets, where college students spilled out of hotel rooms in search of fun despite the chilly weather. After checking into our hotel, we unloaded our luggage. I didn't spot my suitcase. Frigid wind whipped around us as we realized where it could be. One of the cars waiting in the parking lot the day before belonged to a couple who didn't join our group. Dave and Donna had simply come to see us off. In our haste to dodge the sleet, my gear ended up in their vehicle — which was still in another state. My friend, Randy, protected my luggage from the rain; he only stowed it in the wrong car. He apologized and promised to fix the problem.

Lord, what will I do for clean underwear and socks? I felt chilled to the bone and wanted to warm my feet.

Later, Randy told me Dave and Donna would send the suitcase the following morning at his expense. I borrowed clothes from my generous roommates for the next day or so. Plus, I had my toothbrush from the overnight bag for that one night in Tallahassee. Finally, the suitcase arrived from Mississippi.

The ocean water felt too cold for comfort that week, and without sun, there'd be no sunbathing. Even so, now that I was reunited with my suitcase, I could wear my own jeans, pullover, and underwear. Thanks to others' generosity, my spring break turned out better than it might have been otherwise. I would never have chosen this predicament, yet God revealed His faithfulness to tend to my needs as He ministered through these friends. Psalm 8:4 says, "What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?" (NIV). God had me on His mind during this ordeal, and I never had to go without.

As God providentially rules with wisdom and lovingkindness, He sometimes suspends the laws of nature. As believers, we usually call those "miracles." I believe God performed one of those supernatural events to protect me one summer evening a few years ago.

A BROKEN GLASS MIRACLE

Although I've trusted in God for decades, I don't have a propensity to label extraordinary occurrences as "miracles." Found a great parking space at the mall during the rush of the Christmas shopping season? That's good news, but I don't consider that a miracle.

God freed the Israelites from the hard-hearted Pharaoh, parted the Red Sea to allow His people to cross on dry land, and destroyed the pursuing Egyptian army. Jesus turned water into wine and rose from the dead. Now, those are miracles. God suspends the laws of nature that He created to perform miraculous feats. I considered a sale of my favorite snacks at the store to be a blessing — but not a miracle, according to my understanding.

Then, an event took place that seemed to fit what I believed to be the standard for a "miracle." I wasn't expecting it when it crashed into my life. It was even more significant when this took place because I wasn't wearing slippers.

My family of four recently returned from being away for most of the summer. We had much unpacking and sorting to do. It was exhausting. On the second day home, I let sloppy Joes simmer on the stovetop while my boys played outside. In the meantime, I planned to settle in more before calling

everybody for supper.

Over the summer, my family and I shopped at yard sales. Among other items, I bought a candle. That night, back home, I opened a big cabinet where I had planned to store it. The cabinet featured a pair of large glass front doors. As I opened one of the doors, I noticed a wobbly sensation. Just then, the long, flat glass panel in the door slid out of its frame. It crashed to the tile floor, sending glass spikes down the hall, into our kitchen, and under our couch.

I screamed when the glass finished cracking and clattering all over the tile floor where the cabinet stood. My husband heard my cry and ran to check on me. Then, he saw the glass scattered in shards and chunks around my bare feet. Normally, I scuff around the house in soft house shoes, but I didn't wear them that evening. My feet didn't have protection from slippers or even socks. Yet, my legs and bare feet had no scratches, no cuts, no bleeding. Not a single scrape. The pane of glass from the cabinet door had fallen exactly where I'd stood, but I had no marks on my body even while surrounded by a minefield of jagged debris.

During supper, I contemplated how we almost didn't have a meal at our table that night. Had things gone differently, my family would have eaten fast food in a hospital waiting

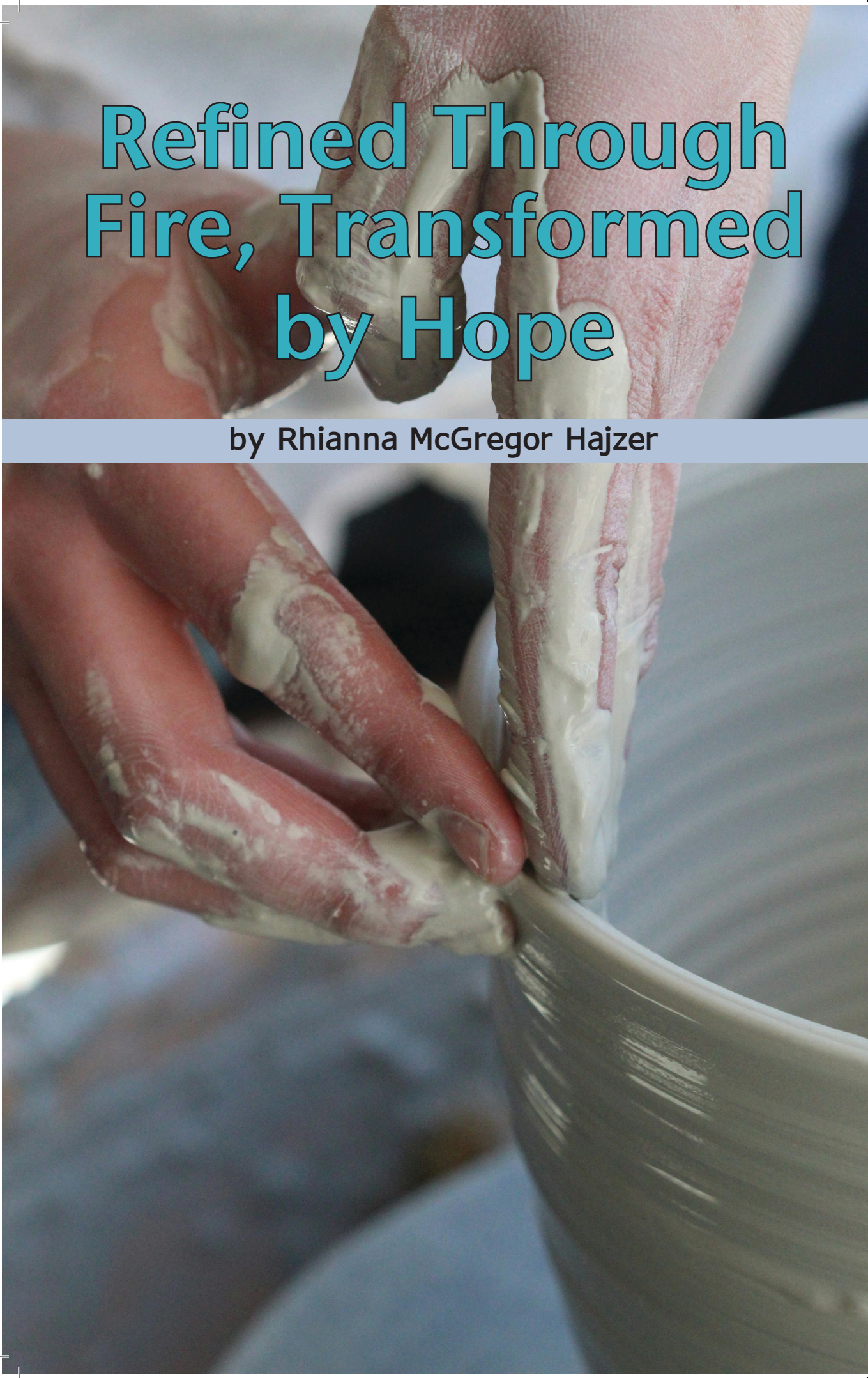
room while I got stitched up in the emergency room.

The broken glass added to my workload. I felt tempted to grumble, but this miracle imparted a lesson despite the extra work that resulted. Instead of succumbing to feelings of frustration, I chose to give thanks that I had been spared injury and a costly trip to the hospital.

The cleanup turned out not to be so bad after all, and for that, I wore my slippers. Years later, we haven't replaced the glass in the cabinet door. My choice to leave it empty first resulted from a sense of frugality. Later, I realized noticing the empty space where the glass had once resided reminded me of God's miracle for a tired mama who wanted to enjoy a meal with her family.

Through knowledge that is too wonderful for us to attain (Psalm 139:6), God works for our good and His glory. Through His people, power, and Spirit, He provides and protects so those who seek the Lord lack no good thing (Psalm 34:10). We can rest in God's providence as He accomplishes His work in the world — and in our lives as His children.

Allison Wilson Lee is a wife, homeschooling mom to two teen boys, blogger, and freelance writer from Belle Isle, Florida.



Refined Through Fire, Transformed by Hope

by Rhianna McGregor Hajzer

The art of creating is a messy business. Transforming something unrefined into a masterpiece begins with the artist's conviction of its intrinsic worth. Every blemish, jagged edge, and rough patch bears potential for beauty and can be the means through which that beauty is revealed through the artist's skilled hands. As the masterpiece is molded and shaped, the glory of the finished work emerges, not only in its renewed form but in the intense love with which it was made.

In the same way, Jesus transforms us. The apostle John contrasts those who reject Jesus by describing the transformative, spiritual birthright Christ's followers receive through faith in this: "But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12, ESV). Through Jesus' loving sacrifice, He redeems enemies of the Lord and adopts them into His kingdom, cleansed from their sin and righteous in His sight. However beautiful and miraculous the conversion from an enemy of God to a child of God is, it is neither easy nor comfortable. Yet, in His infinite grace and wisdom, He knows how to purify us to become the beautiful masterpieces He intended. Still, as gold is refined in fire (1 Peter 1:7), the methods He selects aren't ones we'd choose for ourselves. Even unbelievers are used as instruments of God's will to refine the righteous into godly believers.

“But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12, ESV).

One only needs to glance through news headlines to see how our world celebrates sin and praises those who practice it. What I took for granted as universal morality has become contentious and divisive. It’s no

longer a matter of right and wrong but self-worship and entitled choice.

Rapidly diminishing morality flourishes outside of Scripture, and the evidence is teeming. Unbiblical teaching is frequently preached as truth from church pulpits. Government-enacted policies increasingly interfere with the free worship of the one true God. The pontificators of opinions on social media platforms demand respect, authority, and affirmation. If unreciprocated, the refrainers are perceived as hateful bigots. It stirs in me a longing to escape to a different place, to a time when God was worshipped openly and safely. Surely, biblical times were better.

Sadly, no. It was this way in ancient Israel, too. The book of Psalms is replete with lamentations about the rampant wickedness of the culture and the psalmists’ bitter cries for justice and protection. The wicked plotted

against the righteous (Psalm 37:12), prospered financially (Psalm 73:3-5), sought to put the innocent to death (Psalm 10:8-11), and murdered the widow and the fatherless (Psalm 94:6). They got what they desired, and the righteous suffered without reward or recognition. It’s infuriating and aching familiar.

How long have I envied the wicked because they possessed what I long to have? How often have I witnessed an injustice and cried out for the Lord to have mercy? How much more do I need to surrender my desire for control into the Lord’s hands and let Him carry the weight?

It’s easy to slip into hopelessness in the face of such pervasive evil and question how the Lord could possibly be working in and through such corrupt circumstances and people. In these moments, when I am close to despair, three truths from the Psalms shine through the darkness and lead me to hope: comfort in shared sorrow, grace through vulnerability, and the blessing of rest in God’s sovereign plan.

I am not alone. My contempt for evil and injustice perfectly emulates the psalmists’ plights. With an honesty I can only describe as brutal, they lay their souls bare before the Lord. “Will you forget me forever?” David languishes in Psalm 13:1.

Too often, I’ve feared the Lord’s disappointment. If I were to share my

deepest thoughts with Him, would He be ashamed of what He'd learn? I needn't have worried. He has "searched me and known me" (Psalm 139:1) and already knows my sin. Yet, through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, He sees me, clean and worthy, covered by Christ's righteousness. As a result, I can confide my thoughts and feelings with God.

Our emotions are an integral aspect of our design as His image-bearers. It grieves me that while many Christians fear their emotions and seek to suppress them, the Lord intentionally included the Psalms in His Word, with their raw, unfiltered outpouring of emotion. He isn't upset or disheartened by our humanity. He is a compassionate Father who desires us to cast our anxieties on Him because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7).

Above all, the Lord is sovereign. Our God is a God of grace, justice, and steadfast lovingkindness. Amidst the abounding depravity that leads me to despair that He is working, I find solace in the reminders of His power — power that prevails over any earthly forces I fear in this life. We will inevitably endure hardships — Jesus promised it, but not without His own promise of everlasting hope: "I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

The simultaneous rage and fear arising within me at the injustices assailing believers seek only to lure me away from the Lord. The words of 18th-century preacher Charles Spurgeon challenge my perspective: "The very essence of anxiety is the imagining that we are wiser than God." How often, in my weakness, do I believe I am wiser than the holy God, who created the universe and will see it to its end in His good and perfect time? His ways and thoughts are higher than ours, says the prophet in Isaiah 55:9, and we can rest in this confidence.

This is why we have hope — incredible hope. Though the psalmist bemoans his sorrow to the Lord for evil triumphing over the righteous, he also praises the Lord for His steadfast love, grace, and promised judgment. In Psalm 37:13, David declares, "The Lord laughs at the wicked, for He sees that his day is coming." Every trial we endure is known, and we can wait in blessed assurance of the justice that will be delivered. Those who live by faith in the Lord are destined for eternal life, but those who live in denial of the one true God are "doomed to destruction forever" (Psalm 92:7).

A perfect plan is unfolding and will be brought to fruition at the proper time. The righteous and the wicked will be judged by God's perfect standard, and His judgment is complete.

The Psalms offer immense hope for the faithful. The comfort the psalmists received from God is passed down through their words to us today, embodying 2 Corinthians 1:3-4: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

Early in my Christian walk, I'd bristle whenever someone encouraged me to "trust in the Lord" or to "have faith." They were simple answers, the kind given when nothing truly soothing or reassuring could be found to say in light of my darkest moments. But now, I realize I was being given the ultimate comfort. It's the comfort the psalmists found and in which they placed their hope: the coming salvation of the Lord. "The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their stronghold in the time of trouble. The LORD helps them and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in Him" (Psalm 37:39-40).

With that promise to sustain us and the glory of eternal life with Christ awaiting us, we have abundant hope to persevere through the injustices that prevail in this life. They are not in vain; they are the Lord's paintbrush, and we are His canvas. Each fire we face leaves

scorch marks and burns that may never heal to their original condition. Still, the Lord is sovereign and, even amidst flames, works all things "together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

We need only to trust in His omniscient wisdom. The process is messy and can appear meaninglessly painful, but the Lord is a skilled artist practiced in the art of transformation. Through the inevitable sufferings of genuine Christian disciples resides the ultimate promise of redemption: "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

What greater hope could we have than this?

Rhianna McGregor Hajzer is a freelance writer from Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada.

"He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

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Singing With Grace

by Richard Clark Jr.
(Answers from the NKJV)

Across

1. "This song will testify against them as a witness; for it will not be ___ in the mouths of their descendants" (Deuteronomy 31:21).

5. "But at ___ Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25).

6. "Then Israel sang this song: '___ up, O well! All of you sing to it'" (Numbers 21:17).

8. "You shall have a song as in the night when a holy ___ is kept" (Isaiah 30:29).

10. "David spoke to the LORD the words of this song, on the day when the LORD had ___ him" (2 Samuel 22:1).

11. "They sang ___, praising and giving thanks to the LORD: 'For He is good, for His mercy endures forever'" (Ezra 3:11).

14. "When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of ___" (Matthew 26:30).

17. "You are my hiding place; ... You shall ___ me with songs of deliverance" (Psalm 32:7).

18. "So I brought the leaders of Judah up on the wall, and appointed two large ___ choirs" (Nehemiah 12:31).

19. "The singers sang loudly with ___ the director" (Nehemiah 12:42).

Down

2. "I will sing to the LORD, for He has ___ gloriously! (Exodus 15:1).

3. "Serve the LORD with ___; come before His presence with singing" (Psalm 100:2).

4. "Take away from Me the noise of your songs. ... But let ___ run down like water" (Amos 5:23-24).

7. "Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making ___ in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:18-19).

9. "Now these are the men whom David appointed over the ___ of song in the house of the LORD" (1 Chronicles 6:31).

12. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, ___ and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Colossians 3:16).

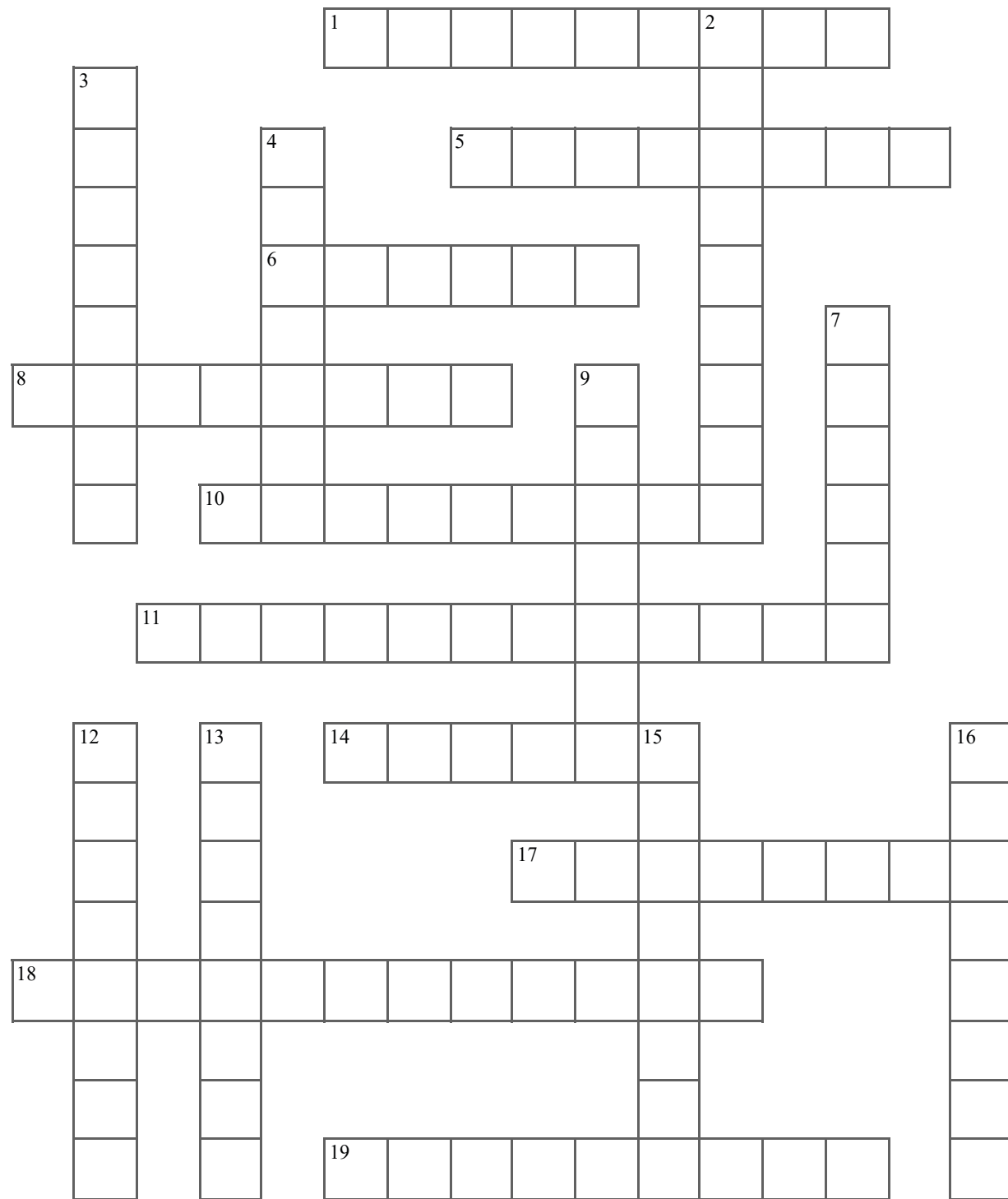
13. "The LORD was ready to save me; therefore we will sing my songs with ___ instruments all the days of our life" (Isaiah 38:20).

15. "The LORD is my ___ and song, and He has become my salvation" (Exodus 15:2).

16. "No one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were ___ from the earth" (Revelation 14:3).

Praying for Others

by Dexter Thomas



Answers on page 32.



I believe in the power of intercessory prayer, which is when we lift others to the Lord. Why? Because it's effective, and the Bible encourages and instructs us to do it (1 John 5:16). If you've never prayed for another person before, I challenge you, as you read this essay, to ponder ways you can uplift others in celebration and supplication before the Lord.

In Psalm 20, King David delivered an intercessory prayer, likely before a battle, but it includes portions we can use in our prayers today, such as Psalm 20:1: "In times of trouble, may the LORD answer your cry. May the name of the God of Jacob keep you safe from all harm" (NLT). Another example of intercessory prayer is Psalm 72, from King Solomon, who was praying for his son.

When we pray for another person, we push back the darkness encroaching on their hearts and minds. I got my inspiration for this from the apostle Paul, who said if our gospel is hidden, it's obscured from those who are lost, in whom the god of this world (Satan) has blinded their eyes (2 Corinthians 4:3-6). Intercessory prayer gives breathing room, allows light to enter dark places in their hearts, enables them to think more clearly, and strengthens their ability to make decisions for Christ.

As an imaginative extrovert, I get bored

pretty quickly. One area where I tend to check out is when praying for the same people. To break through this monotony, I developed a method for praying for my family in creative ways. I started with my mom, then went through my seven siblings, from the oldest to the youngest. Now, I include their spouses, children, and grandchildren. Like anything I do, which has become a habit, I had to find ways to make this activity fun and compelling.

I'm the only one living in California, so we hardly see one another. We don't have family reunions, so our connections are sporadic. Including them in a prayer cycle helps me remain in their lives in a tiny but meaningful manner.

Before I pray for someone on my list, I create a pet name based on an encounter with them or where they are in their lives. This has become an inspiring practice that's warmed my heart as I approach their names in prayer.

So, for my eldest sister Dianne, I'll pray, "Lord, it's Deedee. This is the firstborn, my eldest sister." More often than not, my pet

When we pray for another person, we push back the darkness encroaching on their hearts and minds.

name for a person and their place in the family creates a feeling of respect in me.

This exercise takes me down memory lane as I recall Deedee's crazy antics as a teenager. It does wonders for my focus. I need to have that sweet connection with the person I'm praying for to genuinely bring them before the Lord. For me, these pet names work. It causes me to pause, reflect on favorite memories, and pray with a greater sense of connectivity because it warms my heart and fills me with affectionate feelings for them.

My youngest sister, Andrea, is the last on my list. When praying for her, I begin with, "Bless my baby sister." This releases a string of precious, touching feelings and helps me more fervently pour my heart into the prayer.

When I pray for my nephew, DeAndre, I reflect on him being the lone teenager in the family. For his baby brother, I pray, "Bless your boy, Austin." That's another little title I use to make praying a heartfelt experience. When I say to God, "your boy" or "your baby girl," I see those for whom I'm using these titles as being precious to God. And if they're valuable to God, they become valuable to me. It's incredible how minute details about what's happening in their lives cause me to pause and think about my prayer.

My niece, Sarah, recently bought her

first home. I prayed, "It's your girl, the new homeowner, Sarah." That became a fun way to bring her into my consciousness prayerfully. Beginning the prayer with a noteworthy experience in her life reminds me she isn't just a name I'm praying for but someone who has successes and failures.

For my niece, who's struggled with a myriad of health issues, my prayer begins with, "Here's a young adult who's taken on loads of burdens." Saying that immediately connects me to her suffering. My heart is moved as I come into this prayer.

There are prayers derived from a special occasion in someone's life. Such a focus helps me to identify the phase the family member is experiencing and makes my prayer more purposeful and targeted. Recently, I prayed for my sister, MarrieAnne, to celebrate her birthday. Such commemorative occasions draw my heart into the prayer.

I've connected special occasions, pet names, and a person's status in the family with key emotional terms evoking tenderness. All of this helps me work through what I think are the mundane aspects of praying.

Intercessory prayer has forced me to examine the hypocrisy in my heart. Sometimes, I don't like the people for whom I pray. For a relative who was an alcoholic and mistreated

his wife, I tried being positive in praying over his business. I prayed, "Lord, grant him favor and success." I remembered struggling to pour my heart into those sentiments because, in his case, I thought the sun should only shine on the just. Even the way I approached his name in prayer was from a profoundly negative place. I addressed him as "the troubled one on my list." My thoughts weren't focused on his compassionate nature. I errantly thought of this relative as if his entire life was his alcoholism and poor choices. The Holy Spirit convicted me to realize this man was more than his mess. It was a true "splinter and beam" type of experience (Luke 6:41-46).

It's always interesting praying for people with different values and knowing what to pray for. By values, I'm not talking about morality but activity, purpose, and meaning. These are aspects of my prayer where I wanted God to transform my family into my image. I mistakenly yearned for them to be like me rather than how God created them. In this prayer exercise, I needed the transforming power of the Lord to see these family members through His spiritual eyes.

I've experienced achievements in real estate, so I've prayed for my sister, Tessa, to gain success like my own. After a while, I asked myself how many times I should pray for her to save or make an investment. That was me

pushing my values and agenda. My prayer for her changed when I asked, "What does Tessa want for herself that God wants for her? Which of God's desires for her has she embraced?"

I've learned to start praying for what they want for themselves when it matches what I believe God wants for them. When that's a struggle to figure out, I revert to what we all want: peace, love, and happiness.

Praying consistently for others has opened the curtains to the judgmental spirit I've noticed in myself. Often, I've had to set aside a name on my list and cry out to God about how negatively I assess others. This has led to God revealing lots of judgment in my heart.

Once, I heard myself telling the Lord about a sibling, "I'm not sure if I can pray for growth in her. What's the possibility of her changing?" Oh, wow! God exposed my unbelief in His power to transform people.

This same sibling asked me to pray for a husband for her. My internal, knee-jerk response was, "Why should I pray about her desire for a man when she doesn't think she's desirable?" This is where prayer stretches, grows, and helps us face and overcome our own stinking thinking.

So, this family cycle of prayer keeps these precious ones fresh in my heart. Intercessory

prayer is such a brilliant discipline from God. It humanizes us. One of the most difficult challenges for me has been keeping up with what's happening with those I intercede with so my prayer wouldn't be about yesterday's issues.

This realization has caused me to routinely check in and ask the family what issues they want me to pray for. And for the non-religious members of my family, it could just be a quick text to check-in. For this to work, I created a calendar event called "family check-in for prayer requests." If not, it wouldn't get done, and I'd revert to my prayer feeling like vain words and empty platitudes.

I encourage you to adopt the practice of intercessory prayer, whether it's for family members or other individuals you encounter. Praying for their lives, events, accomplishments, and legacies brings light to their lives and yours. Will you take up this challenge?

Dexter Thomas is a pastor and freelance writer from American Canyon, California.

Puzzle Answers:

Across: 1. Forgotten; 5. Midnight; 6. Spring; 8. Festival; 10. Delivered; 11. Responsively; 14. Olives; 17. Surround; 18. Thanksgiving; 19. Jezrahiah

Down: 2. Triumphed; 3. Gladness; 4. Justice; 7. Melody; 9. Service; 12. Teaching; 13. Stringed; 15. Strength; 16. Redeemed

Processing Anger

by Tammy Darling



My face has no filter. Ask anyone in my family what I'm feeling at any given moment, and they can tell you ... spot on. They don't hesitate to call me on it, either.

I recently yelled down the hallway and through my daughter's closed bedroom door, asking this teenager to load the dishwasher.

She texted, "I don't use the dishes." No emoji out there could have conveyed the mixture of expressions washing over my face upon reading that. In fact, I had to read it twice to ensure I comprehended what I read. I did.

If that wasn't enough, I received a lengthy text from this daughter a week later telling me why she wasn't attending college in the fall. Instead, she enlisted in the United States Air Force. This was after receiving college scholarships, picking out a dorm room, and paying a deposit. There are days when I'm eternally grateful my teenage daughter sends a text instead of telling me something face-to-face. Most parents would never think such a thing, but that's some truth escaping jail right there. Truth is escaping in my life right now; there is no doubt about it.

At this very moment, I'm angry. I am more furious than I've been in a very long time. This can lead to a breakthrough if I process the anger healthily.

Cumulative anger has been building, and an avalanche is about to unleash. I know I must process the anger. I've got to stop pushing it down and pretending I'm doing OK because I'm not. It's OK to acknowledge that we're not OK.

Life's circumstances are overwhelming at the moment: My mother recently passed away six days after her birthday. My husband's new dream job has turned into a nightmare. My computer crashed with all 89,000 photos and my life's writing work, much of which was not backed up. Yes, I know. Just push the thought you're having aside and stick with me.

One of the five stages of grief is anger, but I can honestly say I'm not angry at all about my mother's passing. After suffering from Parkinson's disease and dementia for 13 years, there is relief and joy in knowing she is no longer afraid, trapped in her mind, in pain, or unable to communicate. As her legal guardian, I can now rest in peace as I continue my life without her, knowing she is at rest herself.

The anger started when my husband began his new job. This position was not what we thought it would be, which opened the door to anger. He's working more than twice the hours for less money than his previous job, which also does not help the situation. Relationship time is non-existent, and I grow angrier by the day.

Then, my computer crashed. Anger multiplied.

Here's the thing beneath all the anger: What isn't worked out will be acted out. According to Psalm 37:8, we are to do this instead: "Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret — it leads only to evil" (NIV). It's easier said than done, I know. But that's my goal because unaddressed anger tends to come out sideways, and that's painful for everyone involved.

To avoid erupting like a volcano, I'm keeping my distance from others and remaining somewhat silent as I process my anger. King David, no stranger to anger, had this to say: "Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent" (Psalm 4:4). So, I am being as silent as I can.

My desire to live healed and whole requires me to deal with my anger. So, here's what I'm doing:

1. Take It to Jesus

While I would like these circumstances to change, I'm not in control of that, which is frustrating, and frustration often leads to anger. Therefore, I'm not giving up the hope that things will change or work out for the good. Instead, I'm giving up trying to control situations and releasing it all to Jesus. Repeatedly, I release it to Jesus because I keep picking it back up. I drop it and run. I toss it

on the altar and run. I throw it all at Jesus, hitting Him with it ... and run.

Running isn't the answer. This time, I'm humbly handing it over, truly surrendering, and letting Jesus do with it as He pleases. Then, I'm staying put because falling into Jesus' embrace is the best thing for my anger.

God isn't taking antacids over my circumstances, so I don't need to give myself an ulcer, either.

2. Breathe Deeply

God isn't taking antacids over my circumstances, so I don't need to give myself an ulcer, either. I am practicing deep breathing, something my previous pastor's wife taught me many years ago. Regularly taking deep, cleansing breaths calms my angry soul and works spectacularly for anxiety. Been there, done that, bought the "I Love Xanax" t-shirt. I inhale, exhale, and reap the benefits in the process.

3. Be Flexible

While I'd like all my ducks in a row and even have technology (my computer) run smoothly at all times, life doesn't work like that. Stuff happens, and when things don't go how I think they should, I can get angry if I'm unwilling to adjust.

I need to trust God will work things out even better than they were. In fact, Romans 8:28 ensures me He will: "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." Sometimes, I lose sight of that.

The nature of my husband's new job requires significant flexibility, something we're both still adjusting to. Here's the thing: His current job may be a stepping stone to a better position in the same field. He's applied for this new opportunity and awaits a post-interview response. In the meantime, I will remain flexible so anger doesn't blossom.

4. Prayerfully Trust God

Praying doesn't just bring answers; it also dissipates anger. As I communicate with God and focus on His power and faithfulness, I am less angry simply because my problems aren't my focus. God is.

God alone can open doors no one can shut: "I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept My word and have not denied My name" (Revelation 3:8, NIV). My husband and I can't change the unrealistic job demands and hours, but God can. He opens any door needing to be opened, and He can close any door needing to

be closed. In that knowledge, I can prayerfully trust His ways and timing.

5. Practice Gratitude

There's nothing like gratefulness to eradicate anger because the two cannot coexist. When I am expressing gratitude, there's no possible way for me to be angry simultaneously. While I'd love to hang on to my anger because it makes me feel justified, I know that's not the best path. I've decided to count my blessings instead. My circumstances haven't changed, but 1 Thessalonians 5:18 instructs me to give thanks in everything, so I will.

The more I practice gratitude, the less angry I am. I know what's going on in my life now won't always be the case. To everything there is a season, said Solomon, the wisest man ever, in Ecclesiastes 3; therefore, I need to keep these things in mind as I continue to declare my gratitude.

Like all other emotions, anger is God-created. How I process it will determine whether anger becomes a destructive force or a stepping stone to growth and healing. It all depends on how I process the anger — that is something I can control. I have the keys to freedom, and appropriately processed anger is one of those keys.

Tammy Darling is a frequent contributor to Light magazine from Cassville, Pennsylvania.

A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a denim jacket and dark leggings, is sitting in a meditative pose on a large, light-colored rock. She is holding her hands in front of her, palms up. A patterned blanket is spread out on the rock beneath her. In the background, there is a calm lake reflecting the surrounding forested hills under a cloudy sky.

The Path of Praise

by Ray McAllister

Hebrews 13:5 says God will never leave or forsake us. So, how should we respond when we hear a discouraged friend say God has abandoned them? Should we rush to correct their theology? How should we pray when we sometimes feel abandoned by God? In the following paragraphs, I show how the Psalms present a practical and sensible way to handle these struggles and utilize praise to facilitate healing.

DOES GOD IGNORE OR REJECT US?

It is necessary to note that no one on earth today is the first to feel abandoned by God. Let's look for a moment at Psalm 13. The first verse reads, "How long, LORD, will you continue to ignore me? How long will you pay no attention to me?" (NET Bible).

The Hebrew word for "ignore" is often translated as "forget" in versions like the King James (KJV) and New American Standard Bible (NASB). Here, David asks how long God will forget and hide His face. Now we know God never literally forgets and even takes the word "forget" as referring to ignoring.

The first 37 verses of Psalm 89 praise the excellence of God's love and mercy and how marvelously God has taken care to uphold His Word. Then, in verse 38, the tone changes. Suddenly, God is described as rejecting His own

and causing harm. Verse 39 says, “You have repudiated your covenant with your servant; you have thrown his crown to the ground” (NET Bible).

God always watches over us with care and concern. Nonetheless, Ethan the Ezrahite, the author of Psalm 89, felt abandoned by God. God honored these words and feelings enough to allow them to be included in the Bible.

So, what can we learn from these passages? Again, we’re not the first to feel rejected by God. Also, it is OK to say things about God in our pain that may not be the most theologically grounded. Sometimes, the light of God’s presence is hidden from us in dark times. This is a challenging world. God knows that. He also recognizes we must be able to open up to Him with our feelings so we can heal. He’s big enough to handle our pain.

SUPPORTING WITH SENSITIVITY

This is especially important to remember when ministering to a struggling friend. It is easy to want to correct someone in their time of distress and say, “Oh, God hasn’t abandoned you; He loves you.”

While this statement is theologically sound, the struggling soul may not be ready to hear this truth. We need to do as God did and listen.

Maybe someone who is deeply hurt could be encouraged to express these feelings in poetry or some related art form.

The story shouldn’t end with expressing our displeasure at how we’re being treated by God. Let’s return to the psalms we’ve briefly considered so far. The last verses of Psalm 13 are filled with unbroken praise. “But I trust in your faithfulness. May I rejoice because of your deliverance. I will sing praises to the LORD when He vindicates me” (verses 5-6).

Psalm 89, which starts with praise, turns troubled toward the end but doesn’t remain in that upsetting mode. The last verse declares, “The LORD deserves praise forevermore! We agree! We agree!” (verse 52).

The book of Psalms in the Hebrew Bible is called “Tehillim,” meaning “songs of praise.” This is every psalm, even those that are sad, angry, fearful, or filled with expressions of uncomfortable emotions. Nonetheless, even in the darkest psalms, at least one small note of praise remains.

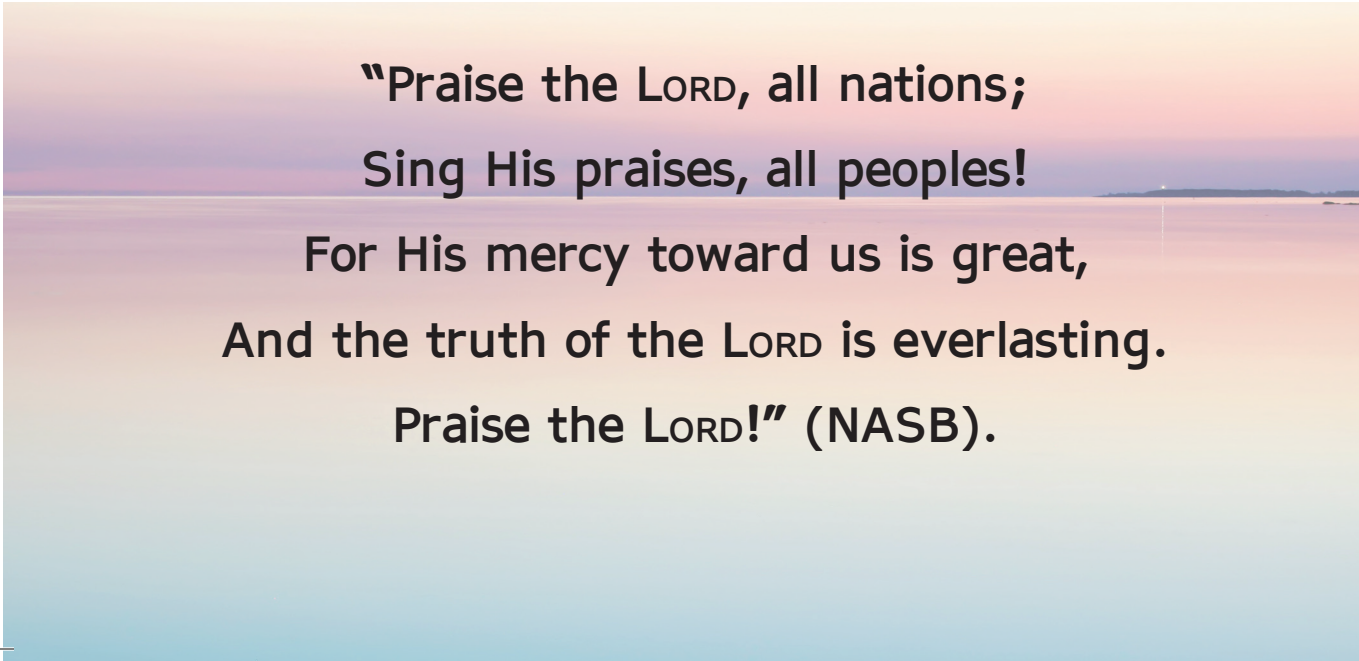
The application of this latter principle is simple, though not necessarily easy. In expressing our feelings about how God is unfair, we must find a way to include some praise, extolling His mercy and love as best we can. However distressed I feel at the moment, I must never cease praising the Lord. If I am

counseling a friend who is struggling with their faith, I must listen to them and find a way to guide them to keep praising God. It may be difficult, but just as smiling can help one feel happier, praising God can lift struggling spirits.

TIMELESS WORDS FOR TEMPORARY TROUBLES

Memorizing and reciting Scripture is a beautiful way to praise God, and Psalms 145-150 is an excellent, rich source. Reading aloud and contemplating these psalms can help the soul remember what it is like to praise the Lord. Memorizing these verses for future use can bless and comfort you and those you minister to.

An example of a small but powerful chapter is Psalm 117. This psalm is only two verses long, but within it is a profoundly simple statement of praise, which is easy for anyone to memorize:



**"Praise the LORD, all nations;
Sing His praises, all peoples!
For His mercy toward us is great,
And the truth of the LORD is everlasting.
Praise the LORD!" (NASB).**

As a blind person struggling to find full-time employment, it is easy to wonder how much God really loves me. What I've learned from the Psalms is that it is not wrong to have such feelings. I must express, work through, and release these emotions into God's loving hands. In so doing, I can open myself to true healing. However long it takes for such healing to happen, I must continually lift praise to God, even if it's by reciting a memorized psalm. I have found the act of reading and speaking these poems and hymns helpful. Sometimes, all one can do is remember another's praise. What better words to remember in times of pain and struggle than those from Scripture?

BEING ANGRY: EXAMPLES FROM CAIN AND JONAH

The Bible illustrates healthy and unhealthy ways people have coped with their emotions. Specifically, it's interesting to compare Cain and Jonah. In Genesis 4, Cain became enraged with God, and Scripture doesn't record Cain expressing that anger to God. God confronted Cain concerning this outrage, but Cain never entered the dialogue. The result was a race down a path of evil, ending in Cain killing his brother.

In Jonah 4, Jonah was angry with God because He showed mercy to Jonah's enemies.

However, unlike Cain, Jonah expressed his feelings to God. While the book of Jonah ends on an ambiguous note, we don't find Jonah continuing down a path of evil toward murder. We can be like Jonah and honestly voice our feelings to God. It may save us from more than just emotional discomfort.

The next time you feel discouraged or are interacting with someone else who is, remember it is necessary to be honest with God about our feelings. However we think about God, we must not forget to include praise in our communication with God as the psalmists did. Such actions allow us to follow a healthy, praise-filled path to complete healing. "Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!" (Psalm 150:6, NET Bible).

Ray McAllister is a frequent contributor to Light magazine from Berrien Center, Michigan.

"You will *not abandon me* to Sheol;
You will not allow your faithful follower
to see the Pit.

You *lead me* in the path of life.

I experience absolute

joy in Your presence;
You always give me *sheer delight*"

(Psalm 16:10-11, NET Bible).

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