

## Meditations on Psalm 91

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## What is “91 for 91”?

Our world is in crisis and our best response is prayer!

Psalm 91 is a beautiful description of the safety and security that can only be found in God, as well as God’s promise of protection for His children.

91 for 91 was originally conceived as a response to the COVID-19 crisis by intentionally looking at and praying through Psalm 91 for 91 days.

The span of 91 days is March 13 to Day 14, 2020.

During this time, these meditations were written every few days in order to glean some truths from this Scripture. We focus on one or more verses each time, and go through the Psalm several times.

Throughout this document, you may notice how this project evolved as we refined our process, and as different personal and corporate events occurred. Some meditations are comforting, some are inspiring, some are convicting, some are joyful, some may bring a chuckle, and some may bring lament. But all describe our real-time, honest and vulnerable journey with the Lord as we move through this crisis. We hope that all who read these are blessed by them.

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*May the Lord bring comfort and courage to your heart as you walk your own journey through these difficult days.*

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(Please note that meditation numbers in this document differ from the number originally used online. That is because we occasionally repeated meditations in the original online posts. This document, however, does not contain any repeated meditations and are numbered consecutively in the order in which each new meditation was written.)

## Psalm 91, New Living Translation

**1** Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

**2** This I declare about the Lord:  
He alone is my refuge, my place of safety;  
he is my God, and I trust him.

**3** For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease.

**4** He will cover you with his feathers.  
He will shelter you with his wings.  
His faithful promises are your armor and protection.

**5** Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night,  
nor the arrow that flies in the day.

**6** Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness,  
nor the disaster that strikes at midday.

**7** Though a thousand fall at your side,  
though ten thousand are dying around you,  
these evils will not touch you.

**8** Just open your eyes,  
and see how the wicked are punished.

**9** If you make the Lord your refuge,  
if you make the Most High your shelter,

**10** no evil will conquer you;  
no plague will come near your home.

**11** For he will order his angels  
to protect you wherever you go.

**12** They will hold you up with their hands  
so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.

**13** You will trample upon lions and cobras;  
you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet!

**14** The Lord says, "I will rescue those who love me.  
I will protect those who trust in my name.

**15** When they call on me, I will answer;  
I will be with them in trouble.  
I will rescue and honor them.

**16** I will reward them with a long life  
and give them my salvation."

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*SECTION 1:*

*MEDITATIONS*

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## #1: Getting Started

Focus: Psalm 91 (vv1-16)

As we begin, please note that we will be going through this Psalm several times through this focus. Each meditation will be a new aspect, even if we've been through a verse before. Come back often!

Prayer Focus:

Take some time with this and allow the Lord to bring comfort and courage to your heart for the season we have just entered!

## #2: Where Do You Sit?, by Becky Sytsema

### Focus Verse: 1

Those who live in the shelter of the Most High  
will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.  
(Ps. 91:1, NLT)

When you sit enthroned under the shadow of Shaddai,  
you are hidden in the strength of God Most High.  
(Ps. 91:1, Passion)

### Meditation:

What a great place to begin! As we begin looking at the individual verses of this Psalm and praying through them over the current world crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, what better place to start than looking at our own position with God?

This verse is so clear that there is a certain level of God's protection available to those who sit with God, and who choose to live in His presence. During this season of what might be described as a forced Sabbath, take some time to consider your own situation with God. Do you take time to sit with God? Do you choose to dwell in His presence? Do you draw from the peace and protection that can only be found there?

Being a Christ-follower is far more than saying a quick prayer and calling it good. No matter what these next weeks bring to our world, take some time to ask God what it means to sit with Him, and what it means to live in His presence.

### Prayer Focus: Yourself

Ask the Lord to make you more mindful of ways you can be sitting in His presence. If these next weeks give you more down time, now is the time to work on your sitting skills and make them a part of your spiritual formation and the rhythm of your life!

## #3: A Superabundance of Help, by Becky Sytsema

### Focus Verse: 2

This I declare about the LORD:  
He alone is my refuge, my place of safety;  
he is my God, and I trust him. (Ps. 91:2, NLT)

He's the hope that holds me and the Stronghold to shelter me,  
the only God for me, and my great confidence. (Ps. 91:2, Passion)

### Meditation:

Our world needs real help. Right now. We may be more aware of it today than we were last week, but it's a truth that has never changed. But is there anywhere in the world that can we feel completely safe? Especially now?

Well, the truth is that such a place can't be found on GoogleMaps, because such a place of total shelter and protection has no earthly address. Nevertheless, true safety exists in all corners of the world! Even in Italy. Even in China. And even in Iran.

How can that be? It's because the Holy Spirit inhabits His people, no matter where they are. As Christ-followers, we have the beautiful promises of Psalm 91:2—that He is the hope which holds us, confident, safe, and sheltered. No amount of hand sanitizer or social distancing can offer all that we need right now. Our needs go far deeper than our physical health. But no matter how challenging these times get, God is prepared to meet each of us with all the help we need.

I love what John Calvin wrote about Psalm 91:2 many hundreds of years ago: "This holy species of boasting constitutes the very highest triumph of faith, when we betake ourselves to God without fear under our worst trials, and are fully persuaded that he answers all our prayers, nay, that we have in him a sufficiency and a superabundance of help." (Calvin's Commentary on the Bible).

### Prayer Focus: Medical Professionals

Ask the Lord to bring special protection to those in the medical field, particularly in hospitals and urgent care centers.

- Protection from illness as they are dealing with an increasingly infected population
- Patience as illness and tempers are on the rise
- Strength for the long work hours and overcrowding they may be facing



## #4: The Better News, by Jack Sytsema

### Focus Verse: 3

Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler  
And from the perilous pestilence. (Ps. 91:3, NKJV)

For he will rescue you from every trap  
and protect you from deadly disease. (Ps. 91:3, NLT)

### Meditation:

It's easy to read this verse and think that followers of Jesus have an automatic exemption from pain and suffering. Some people might go so far to say that they are immune from all sickness. Wouldn't that be nice? Maybe not! What is Psalm 91:3 really saying to us?

Perhaps it means something better than what we read at first glance!

This is the situation. If we ever suffer or things do not work out the way we wanted them to, the enemy wants us to think that God has abandoned us. But, Psalm 91 is giving us better news. It reminds us over and over that God is with us in our troubles. After Adam and Eve sinned, God did not abandon them. Instead, he came into their situation to protect them from the deadly consequences of sin. The results of sin were set in motion. But God walked into their condition to protect them from the eternal destruction that was unleashed on earth. He gave them shelter and a relationship despite the devastating plans of sin.

And thousands of years later, God continues to do that for us. He keeps walking into our situation so He can be with us.

*From Every Trap* – Satan is the one who sets traps and cages to sabotage the Christian. That is what he did in the Garden. The imagery of this verse is of a hunter catching a bird in a cage so the bird can be killed. **But God**. He says the enemy will not be able to trap you and extinguish the purposes that God has for your life. Because of Christ, there is no cage that can hold us back from God's plans. Our futures are secure. The plans that God has for your life – they are immune from any virus.

*From Deadly Disease* – No deadly disease or virus can eternally kill the Christian. Our eternity is secure in Christ. We may suffer the inconvenience of a virus, or the unsettling of financial instability, or even get sick. But this chapter says your eternal future is never at risk. The plans that God has for your life – they are immune from any virus.

This virus is helping us to all think differently -- to live with an eternal perspective. It's so easy to think our comfort and protection and our security come from our bank accounts or our job or the

grocery story. But this verse reminds us that our security is from our relationship with Christ. That is true comfort. It reminds us we have a personal relationship with the one who shelters us and gets us out of any trap.

It is a battle to not let fear lead us. That is why the Bible tells us to be grateful. Take some time today to mediate on how God has provided for you this week. I encourage you to dig deep. You will be surprised. And encouraged.

### Prayer Focus: The Completely Isolated

Today please pray for those who live alone and are now completely isolated. Pray that they would feel the presence of God today, and that He would lay them on the hearts of others to get in touch with them. In fact, if there is someone you know like this, why don't you take a moment to reach out via text, email, Facebook message, or a phone call?

## #5: The Wings of Safety, by Susie Renzema

### Focus Verse: 4

He will cover you with his feathers.  
He will shelter you with his wings.  
His faithful promises are your armor and protection.  
(Ps. 91:4, NLT)

### Meditation:

I have one of those daily flip calendars. Interestingly, Psalm 91:4 was the verse for Sunday so it was fresh on my mind. Then yesterday's meditation said this, "As you slip under the covers (tonight), remember you're not under your circumstances, you are under the shadow of His wings." Susie Larson

That got me thinking about helpless baby birds and the mothers who keep them safe during storms. What is mom's advantage? She has fully developed wings to protect her. And, maybe more importantly, she has experienced storms before. On their own, her chicks are defenseless. They don't have what they need, either physically or experientially, to survive a raging storm. But the mom -- she has what they need and she knows what to do when storms come to keep her babies safe.

But keeping her babies safe began long before the storm, and well before her chicks arrived. She worked long and hard building a nest for them to take shelter and comfort in. She had a storm-ready home prepared before they were ever even born.

When the storm comes, she calls them together under her feathers, her wings. But that is only effective if they are in the nest she has prepared, and if they are willing to come together under her protection. Under her wings, they are closely packed in. They must be close to each other for warmth and so they can all fit under the shelter of her water and wind-repelling feathers. Then she stretches her wings over them, she puts her head down and she takes the beating of the storm while they stay close together and safe underneath. All the beating of the rain and the force of the wind is taken by her. Yes, they will get wet. They may be cold and uncomfortable. They may even be in pain under her wings with their siblings' claws and beaks digging into tender places. But they never, ever bear the brunt of the storm.

When the storm is raging and they are particularly afraid, they may try to get out from under her wings or even try to leave the nest in a panic. But my guess is, she does all she can to keep them in the nest and under her wings. She knows that is the safest place for them.

How does this relate to us in this time of fear and uncertainty, during this storm of life we are currently facing?

We are the baby chicks and Jesus is the mother bird. The nest is the hollow of God's hand and, according to John 10:28, we can never be snatched out of the Father's hand if we belong to Christ. That doesn't mean we won't experience storms. But He is covering us with His wings. He is taking the brunt of this storm protecting us from all kinds of unforeseen and devastating threats. And although we are uncomfortable right now, and some of us may even be in pain under His wings, it is here that we are safest. It is here that He will provide us with what we don't have to survive on our own.

And another thing--this is the time when we need to huddle close together for warmth and comfort while under His wings. This is not the time to go it alone. And although we have the added challenge of not being able to meet together right now, thank God for the technology that can keep us connected in spite of physical distance.

Finally, the last phrase of this verse says, "His faithful promises are your armor and protection." I don't think that's a guarantee that we or someone we love won't get sick or experience some other difficulty during this time. The Bible is not a book of formulas to get God to do what we want. I think the armor and protection spoken of here is the protection of our minds and hearts during this time of fear and uncertainty.

According to Paul Tripp; "Whenever trouble consumes our meditation, it's because we have ultimately forgotten God. We have forgotten that there is a Lord of glory, wisdom, goodness, power, and grace who sits on the throne of his universe. No difficulty of any kind - no person, place, or pandemic - can negate his good and glorious promises to his children."

This is the time to get out our Bibles and repeat, or maybe discover for the first time, the promises of God to ourselves and to others. If we go to the Word, we will see the character of God on display. We will see His tremendous love for us. We will know that whatever comes, our God is good and loving. We will be comforted that He can keep us safe no matter what storm is raging.

### Prayer Focus: Family and Friends

Who can you pray for or encourage today? Consider who might be particularly struggling spiritually right now. Pray for friends and family members who aren't "in the nest" and don't know the God of all comfort. Pray for open doorways of conversation about Jesus. Give testimony to the peace and security you have in Him.

## #6: Stayed, by Susie Renzema

### Focus Verse: 5

Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night,  
nor the arrow that flies in the day. (NLT)

### Meditation:

Do not be afraid, night or day, do not be afraid. But how? How do we keep our minds from racing around to all the worst-case scenarios playing out like a scary movie in our brains, especially when we lay down at night?

In reflecting on this verse, I was reminded of something I was working on just 12 days ago in my Scripture journal. In writing and reflecting on the Lenten theme of repentance, I was asking the Lord, how do I keep from doing, thinking, saying those things that lead me to sin and then to need to repent again before Him? As I was practicing being still and trying to listen, Isaiah 26:3 came to me; "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you because he trusts in you." That's what I was longing for that morning, perfect peace. This is what I wrote in my journal that day:

"My mind is not 'stayed' on you Lord, it is for the first hours of the day while I sit here in my chair with my Bible open, but as soon as I leave this space it starts racing with all the things of the world--my daily tasks, my lists, emails, social media, my calendar--Jesus how do I keep my mind 'stayed' on you all day? For that matter, what does 'stayed' even really mean?"

So, I went to Webster's, my favorite place to start. Here's what I found:

Stayed - to stop going forward: pause: to stop doing something: cease: to continue in a place or condition: remain: to stand firm: to stick or remain with (as in a race, a trial of endurance, etc.) to the end. :to stop or delay the proceeding or advance of by or as if by interposing an obstacle: HALT: the action of halting or being stopped: to fix on something as a foundation.

So, if my mind is to be "stayed" on you Lord, I need to practice stopping, pausing, ceasing, delaying, halting AND; continuing, remaining, sticking (with), fixing (on)...

Keeping my mind "stayed" on you is going to require real effort on my part, it will not be automatic. This is one of those areas where you require me to do something. This is what it means to "take every thought captive" and to "guard your heart and mind" from Philippians 4:7. "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace which exceeds anything we can

understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7

And then I remembered something I’d learned when I first started studying the Bible years ago. The Alphabet! That’s right. Let me explain.

When my mind is flooded with worry or anxiety, I NEED to get it fixed, or “stayed” on something else. This is more than just flipping on the TV or picking up a magazine or my laptop. I not only need to shift the focus in order to push out the worrisome thoughts, I need to REPLACE the worrisome thoughts with truth. Not just any truth, solid, powerful, biblical truth. And when we are filled with worry, the best thing to remind ourselves of is the character of God. I need to tell myself who God is so I can rest confidently in who it is I am taking my racing, anxious thoughts to.

And this is how it works, start with the letter A and work your way through the entire alphabet finding a word that starts with each letter that affirms who God is. When we do this, we are not only telling ourselves the truth of who God is. We are also affirming who God is to our listening enemy. And he hates to be reminded of the power and glory of the God who will ultimately defeat him!

### Prayer Focus: Staying Power

If this new season of social distancing has you forced to slow down and stay put, ask the Lord to show you the wonderful opportunity He is giving you to spend more time with Him, learning to ‘stay’ while begin force to stay put. Also, is there anyone you know whose job is demanding far more than usual during this time of crisis? Pray for them that the Lord would give them a greater ability to keep their minds and hearts stayed on Him even through all the added demands.

Scripture Journaling Plan: Character of God A-Z can be found in Section 2, page 110

## #7: They Don't Know: Part One, by Becky Sytsema

### Focus Verse: 6

Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness,  
nor the disaster that strikes at midday. (NLT)

### Meditation:

Last night as dusk was fast approaching, I stood on my porch taking in the oddness I was witnessing. There was no commotion of kids playing, and hardly any noise coming from the usually busy nearby roads. And yet, the air was full of sound. No one was out for their evening walks or working on projects in their garages. And yet, there was plenty of activity.

As it turns out, the lack of human goings-on had not affected the rhythms of the birds at all. Finches and sparrows who had triumphantly endured the Michigan winter were now joined by migrant robins, red-winged blackbirds, and flocks of geese—each adding their own call to the air and busying themselves with their particular brand of courting, pairing up, and crafting their nests. The hectic springtime activity of the birds only made the lack of human neighborhood interactions more poignant. And then this thought struck me: They don't know!

They don't know about the sudden changes that have affected almost every aspect of our daily lives. They don't know about social distancing or "flattening the curve." They don't know about the worldwide dread of COVID-19 that stalks us in the darkness, or the fear of the economic disaster that strikes us at midday. They don't even know about the shortage of toilet paper!

I found myself envying them, wishing that I didn't know either—longing to rewind a week or two back to a world that made more sense, and wondering if it ever will again. My guess is that there are many others wishing and wondering the same things. And yet here, right in the middle of Psalm 91 we are told not to dread, not to fear. Really? Maybe God doesn't know how terrifying this is either!

Yet, as I think about today's verse, I am comforted. Not by the admonishment to not fear because, frankly, I'm incapable of that on my own. Truthfully, I've had my moments these past few days when waves of dread have washed over me. But those moments have not taken a true hold on my heart. They have not overcome me. Why? Because God has proven Himself faithful to me over and over and over again.

I am also comforted because the instruction here is not a stand-alone verse. It's wrapped into a greater text filled with God's goodness and kindness and might and salvation. He has used His Word to tell me stories of His great faithfulness through the ages, and to comfort me through days of distress and long, dark nights of uncertainty.

He has shown up for His people in far more dire circumstances than we are facing today. He delivered Israel out of the bondages of Egypt. He parted the Red Sea to secure their escape. He worked miracles of provision every day for 40 years to keep them fed. In God's power, David defeated Goliath with meager weapons, and Daniel escaped the lions' den with no weapons at all. God defeated the diseases that stalked in the darkness. He delivered from the disasters that struck at midday.

And His Word is not just filled with ancient stories that only affected ancient people. In the greatest story of rescue and deliverance, He made a way for you and a way for me to escape the disease of sin that stalks in the dark, and the disaster of eternal death that strikes at midday!

He has shown His grace and mercy to us by defeating death, by defeating the grave, by defeating hell itself. And so, the question I have asked myself today is, has the God who can do all of that really been defeated by a virus? Has the current economic upheaval depleted His resources? Has God lost His resolve to fulfill His promises to us here in 2020?

Yes, it seems as though everything in the world has changed. And yet for the Christ-follower, absolutely nothing has changed. Our God remains powerful. Our God remains strong. Our God remains the Great Deliverer, the Great Healer, the Great Provider.

Let us not be the generation whose adversity undoes our faith, or our steadfast belief in the power of our God. Let us not be the generation who, after all He has done for us, loses heart in such a way that God looks down upon and says, "I've provided all they need. But they don't know."

### Prayer Focus: Overwhelming Fear

Are you feeling gripped by fear? Matthew 6:26-27 says, "Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?" If this seems impossible for you today, take time with the Lord—real time with the Lord. Sit with Him. Pour your heart out to Him. What is it that you really fear? Talk to Him about that. And then, ask Him to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. Ask the Holy Spirit to minister peace, comfort and assurance to your heart. He has not forgotten you, or His promises to you. The true depth of God's faithfulness and love doesn't shine its brightest on days of peace and plenty. It shines its brightest on days of fear and doubt when we choose to turn our face toward Him--only to see that His eyes of mercy and grace are already fixed on us!



## #8: They Don't Know: Part Two, by Becky Sytsema

### Focus Verses: 7-8

Though a thousand fall at your side,  
though ten thousand are dying around you,  
these evils will not touch you.  
Just open your eyes,  
and see how the wicked are punished.

### Meditation:

I was born on the mission field. Cochabamba, Bolivia, to be exact, located in the foothills of the Andes mountains. My family moved back to the US when I was six, so my memories of those early days are few. But I remember our Sunday evenings. Our whole family would go out and participate in "open-air meetings." My mom had her accordion, and my dad had a Bolivian drum made out of cowhide with the hair still on it. My two sisters and I had handheld percussion instruments. Mine were "claves," two short sticks that I banged together in a rhythm of my own that bore no resemblance to any actual beat.

Along with others on guitars and trumpets, we would go out to the open market and serenade all who would listen with Bolivian gospel music. My dad or a local pastor would then go on to preach over the noise of the crowd. Every week between 2 to 15 would sincerely give their lives to the Lord and join the church. Why did my parents spend 16 years of their lives in Bolivia doing things like open air meetings? Because, they would say of these precious Bolivians for whom Jesus bled and died, "they don't know."

My parents' passion for the lost was not lessened when we moved from Bolivia. In fact, my father's California license plate was Matthew 28:19, and my mom's was Matthew 28:20, "Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

These last words of Jesus before He ascended into heaven (also known as the great commission) are deep in my bones. I was taught these passages alongside of my ABCs. So, when I come to verses like Psalm 91:7-8, there is a catch in my heart.

Am I comforted by the promises of protection? Yes. These militant words of God's devotion to my protection and security help me through sleepless nights of my human doubt and largely needless angst. They tell me of God's great patience as He reassures me over and over and over again of things that I should already have firmly in my heart. (If you are feeling a need for greater

encouragement of protection today, I recommend you take some time to read other meditations in this series.)

The catch in my heart because of these verses is for the thousand, for the ten thousand mentioned here. The tension I struggle with is knowing that I should be numbered among the wicked being punished. What's the one difference between me and them? I know what they don't know.

I know that great abundance in my life has nothing to do with a bank account or anything I possess. I know that the depth of my value has nothing to do with my own accomplishments or merit. I know that the favor on my life has not been set by arbitrary fortune or aligned stars. I know that there is no finality in my death, which is only a passage to an eternal life that I cannot begin to truly imagine. And I know that I am not numbered among the wicked bound for punishment, not because of what I know, but because of Who I know.

So, to those of you who also know these things, here's the situation: An opportunity unlike any we have seen in our lifetime has just flung its doors wide open. Why? Because the world has just been set into a state of panic. For those who do not know the Lord, what brought comfort and security last week is now shaking beneath their feet. I'll even go so far as to say that many who are merely cultural Christians aren't feeling much better off. Uncertainty and fear are great human motivators for looking for reliable places of safety. Doubt and anxiety can drive anyone to try and fill a hungry void. In other words, now that everything is in turmoil, they are trying to figure out what it is that they don't know!

Social distancing is a thing. Spiritual distancing is not. Now is not the time to draw so into ourselves that we don't see others around us. Neighbors, Facebook friends, the checker in the grocery store standing a far away as possible and handling your purchases with plastic gloves. In 1527 Martin Luther addressed his unwillingness to leave Wittenberg during the fear of Black Death also known as bubonic plague. He put it in perspective by saying, "If God should wish to take me, He will surely find me, and I have done what He has expected of me, and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others."

And of what we are facing today, Justin Taylor wrote, "Our journey with the coronavirus has just begun, and it may soon fizzle out into the dim memories of the medical history books. But it is also a God-ordained opportunity for many Christians to display the love of Christ in service to their neighbors, and to live out the fearlessness of death that Christ has won for all his children."

At the end of the day, at the end of this present crisis, and at the end of the lives of those whom we have known, let no one say, "I didn't know" because we didn't tell them!

## Prayer Focus: For Those Who Don't Know

Pray for the lost that they would come to know Christ. Pray for the hurting and desperate Christians, that they would come to know Christ better. Pray that God would open divine doors of communication and connection to those ready to receive Him. And pray that the church would not miss this beautiful opportunity to “Display the love of Christ in service to their neighbors, and to live out the fearlessness of death that Christ has won for all his children.”

## #9: Our Sovereign God, by Susie Renzema

### Focus Verses: 9-10

If you make the LORD your refuge,  
if you make the Most High your shelter,  
no evil will conquer you;  
no plague will come near your home. (NLT)

### Meditation:

As I read these verses, my heart is troubled. I am troubled by the seeming “if– then” promise; by the idea that following Jesus is a sort of transaction: “If I obey, then he’ll respond.” This troubles me because it’s exactly how I used to view my relationship with God. I looked at verses like these as a sort of guarantee. I’m not sure how I arrived at that conclusion, but I can definitely tell you what changed: I had a heart attack.

Lots of people have heart attacks, but not healthy, 32 year-old women with young children and no risk factors. But I did. It upended my whole world and set me on a course of fear and anger toward God that would take years to recover.

As I read these verses, my first thought was: how do I reconcile the hope of verse 10 with the reality that God-loving people will, and have, died of this virus? It was in the early hours of Sunday morning that my own story began to replay in my mind. How does it relate to what is happening now?

When I had my first heart attack, I was a follower of Jesus and a budding leader in my church. But I didn’t really know the God I was serving. My knowledge of Him came from devotionals and other people’s version of who He was, instead of from the Bible. I didn’t understand His character and I still believed, on some level, that I could earn His love and protection. My heart attack left me feeling utterly unprotected. So, I searched for the wrong I did, the prayers I didn’t pray, the truth I missed. When I couldn’t find the answers to my searching, I concluded that I dropped out of God’s sight. I was taught that God is good, but didn’t find that to be true in my life. My fear and mistrust turned to anger and depression, leading me further still from Him.

I didn’t understand the sovereignty of God then, but it gives me great comfort now. God’s sovereignty tells me, “before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart...” (Jeremiah 1:5). He knew when I would take my first breath in this world and He knows when I will take my last. This doesn’t mean I live recklessly, but it challenges me to live with courage rather than fear.

Understanding God's sovereignty doesn't mean I sit on my hands and do nothing. It calls me to fearlessly love my neighbor, as I love myself. During this pandemic we are called to social distancing, but we are not called to spiritual distancing.

This moment in time is particularly difficult because as human beings, we are naturally drawn toward action. We seek to bring meaning to the madness by reaching out. We desire to make a meal or bake bread or bring something in our hands to the ones we love. But unless those hands are scrubbed clean and wearing protective gloves, will they really want what we bring?

How do we serve and socially distance at the same time? I suggest we pick up the phone and ask people how they are and we really listen. We pray with them. If they have a physical need we are able to meet, we say our prayers and wash our hands and do what we can, leaving the outcome in the loving hands of our sovereign God.

My security is in a sovereign God, who knows not only the number of my days, but "every hair on my head" (Matthew 10:30). Read Matthew 10: 28-31. See how valuable you are to God! Every day we wake up to increasingly terrifying information about this global pandemic. What do you do? Return to verse 9 and pray verse 10 in faith. Make the Lord your refuge and the most-high your shelter. Run to Him again and again. Pour your heart out to him and believe in faith that he hears you. This same sovereign God who knows the hairs on your head "keeps track of all your sorrows. He collects your tears in his bottle and records each on in his book" (Psalm 56:8).

Doesn't that blow your mind? You have never shed a single tear without God in heaven knowing. Your God is an attentive and loving father! He's God over you and God over me. He's God over the world and He is God over COVID-19. The virus will not advance further than He allows it, because He is sovereign. You can rest in God's sovereignty today.

### Prayer Focus: Resting in God's Sovereignty

Today, focus on praying that the peace that passes understanding, which is only available when we rest in the sovereignty of God, would rest on your home and in the homes of all those living under the blood of Christ.

## #10: Letting Goodness Catch You, by Susie Renzema

### Focus Verse: 11

For he will order his angels  
to protect you wherever you go. (NLT)

### Meditation:

Psalm 91:11 is another verse that creates that tension for me. This is another one of those promises that I feel can be taken out of context or prayed and appropriated as a way to order God around. It's like the little child that comes at you in anger and says, "buy you said" and then repeats some promise you made to them in a completely inappropriate way.

I'm not going to lie, I've been wrestling with this verse all day and it's now after 8:00 p.m. and I have nothing, or maybe I have everything but just not what I'd like. You see, this is another one of those sovereignty verses. God does and will order His angels to protect us but, once again, this isn't a guarantee.

Because the truth is protection doesn't always come in the way we'd like it to. Right now it's coming packaged as forced separation from our families and friends. But we know it's for our good, so we do it. And praying this Psalm is for our good too because it reminds us of who our God is and how much power he holds. But there it is right there, He holds the power to end this thing, not us. He is the one in control.

Yesterday we talked about how valuable we are to Him and how attentive He is to every detail of our lives, and that is a promise, that's who He is. It reminds me of the recent Bible study we just recently completed on Psalm 23. We learned that the detailed, personal attention of the Shepherd is the same detailed attention of our God. One thing that has been playing and replaying over in my head from Psalm 23 is the last verse, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." In our study we learned that the original Greek for the word "follow" actually means chase. Goodness and mercy will "chase" you all the days of your life, and why? So that you will dwell in the house of the Lord FOREVER.

My understanding of this is that all things, good and bad are part of the end goal of getting me into the house of the Lord forever. God's goodness and mercy are not just something that gets me through suffering and trials, God's goodness and mercy are the means that get me to my eternal home. So, as we now navigate more freedoms being taken away for our protection, as we will watch in the days and weeks to come the number of cases in our own community rise. Will we still be able to see the goodness and mercy in it all? Will we see the loving hand of God even if the news is bad?

Some disease is healed on this side of heaven and we rejoice in that. But we are promised that all disease is healed in the age to come. We will dwell in the house of the Lord forever, where no pandemic, no peril, no calamity, no fear, no worry will ever exist. There will only be goodness and mercy! Practice looking for it in this time of trial, let it catch you no matter your circumstances right now.

### Prayer Focus: Stop Running

We may need to stay where we are for now, but that doesn't mean we can't run – at least from God. In this time of uncertainty and trial, choose to stop running. Ask God to overwhelm you and your home with His goodness and mercy.

## #11: Angels, by Becky Sytsema

### Focus Verse: 12

[God's angels] will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

### Meditation:

When I was a teenager, I remember reading a Christian novel in which angels played a prominent role. While the book was fiction, it left me with real questions about angels. So, I went to my father, who was a seminary professor, and began asking about angels in the real world.

He told me a story of when he and my mom were convinced of an angelic intervention in the life of my older sister Ruth many years earlier. When I was a baby, my mother was out walking. She was holding me in her arms and Ruth was walking beside her. Without any warning, Ruth broke free of my mom's protective grip on her hand. For reasons only the mind of a young child can understand, she ran into the road, right into the path of an oncoming car. The car could not possibly have stopped in time to avoid the young child who "came out of nowhere."

In the split second before a tragic collision, my mother, who watched in horror, saw some unseen force push my sister back to safety. My mom said it was like something literally shoved Ruth in the opposite direction of her momentum, out of the path of the oncoming car. So much so that her hair went flying forward – Hollywood special effects style. What she saw broke the law of physics. There was no earthly explanation for it. My mom, who had no real understanding of the supernatural at the time, exclaimed out loud, "I just saw an angel!"

After telling me the story, my dad did what seminary professors love to do. He gave me an assignment of recommended reading. I didn't read everything on the list. I didn't need to. The first book, which he took off of his shelf and gave to me right then, was "Angels, Angels, Angels" written by Billy Graham in 1975. I read it cover-to-cover in a day.

It was an amazing book taking a theologically sound, in-depth look at the topic of angels in Scripture. Plus, there were compelling modern-day accounts of angelic interjection. Among many, many other stories, Billy Graham quoted Elizabeth Elliot's own account: "My father, when he was a small boy, was climbing on an upper story of a house that was being built. He walked to the end of a board that was not nailed at the other end, and it slowly began to tip. He knew that he was doomed, but inexplicably the board began to tip the other way, as though a hand had pushed it down again. He always wondered if it was an angel's hand."



Billy Graham writes, “But why write a book on angels? Isn’t talking about angels merely adding to the speculation about supernatural phenomena? What possible value is there in such a discussion? Because all the powers of the evil world system seem to be preying on the minds of people already disturbed and frustrated in our generation, I believe the time has come to focus on the positives of the Christian faith. ... It is God who is omnipotent. God has provided Christians with both offensive and defensive weapons. We are not to be fearful; we are not to be distressed; we are not to be deceived; nor are we to be intimidated.”

He goes on to say, “One of Satan’s sly devices is to divert our minds from the help God offers us in our struggles against the forces of evil. However, the Bible testifies that God has provided assistance for us in our spiritual conflicts. We are not alone in this world!”

I think one big reason we want to “Pray 91 for 91” is so we can remember that God is on our side, even in the midst of a pandemic. We may not always understand how He is protecting us. Susie pointed out in yesterday’s meditation that “protection doesn’t always come in the way we’d like it to. Right now, it’s coming packaged as forced separation from our families and friends.” And so it is.

God’s ways truly are higher than ours. We can’t possibly look through our human lens and satisfy our lack of understanding of why or how He moves. Nevertheless, here in Psalm 91 and in many passages of the Bible, God is clear that angels are widely present on earth and stand at the ready. At God’s command, they interject protection, help, provision, even divine messages into our lives. I am left wondering (whether or not we’ve ever seen a child yanked from the path of an oncoming car) how often angels have already intervened on your behalf and on my behalf without us ever knowing.

As John Calvin wrote, “The angels are the dispensers and administrators of the divine beneficence toward us; they regard our safety, undertake our defense, direct our ways, and exercise a constant solicitude that no evil befall us.”

If you need a break from all that’s going on and want to immerse yourself in something other than Netflix, I recommend taking some time to read this book, now called “Angels” by Billy Graham. I got a copy on Kindle yesterday and I’m so glad I did!

### Prayer Focus: Thank God for His Protection

Take some time today to thank God for all the ways that He has protected you, whether you’ve known it or not (because He has). Thank Him that angels stand at the ready to move on your behalf, and that God loves you enough to do so, whether you know it or not. Thank Him that He is ready to move in the lives of countless millions through the crisis of this pandemic, and to draw a lost and dying world to Himself, whether they know it or not. Yet.

## #12: Choosing to Get Caught, by Becky Sytsema

### Focus Verse: 13

You will trample upon lions and cobras; you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet!  
(NLT)

You'll even walk unharmed among the fiercest powers of darkness, trampling every one of them beneath your feet! (The Passion Translation)

### Meditation:

I am writing today's meditation through tears. And honestly, a bit of fear and anxiety. I'm lying in bed with my 21-year-old son, Nick, who has become very sick in the past 24 hours. He's had a cough for a few days. But high fever, somewhat shallow breathing and complete listlessness came on fast yesterday afternoon.

To complicate matters, my son has severe, non-verbal autism. He can't tell me how he feels, where it hurts, or if he's feeling worse. But he is the sickest I can ever remember seeing him. So, is it COVID-19? We don't know. And there's a good chance we won't know. After going through 4 levels of prescreening, I learned that what few tests are available in Michigan are reserved for medical personnel and those with auto-immune disorders. So, while they admit he is showing all the concerning symptoms, he doesn't qualify to get tested.

Either way, he is very sick at a time when being very sick is very scary. But at this moment he is resting, so I decided to work on this meditation.

I had a great story all lined up to use for this verse, but I'm going to save that until the next time we go through this Psalm. For now, in this raw moment of needing to lean into all those things I say I believe, I choose to take the comfort in the power of this verse, in beauty of this Psalm, and in the God about whom it was written—and in His fierce love for Nick and for our family.

I choose to have faith. My choice is not because I think that I need to rally some show of faith in order to coax God to move. Nor is it because I think that God will refuse to move if I admit to having fear or anxiety. I'm not even just trying to talk myself into something by repeating "I believe" over and over.

If anything, the opposite is true. I choose to have faith because I choose to remember. I remember the times God has shown up when I've had nothing left. I remember the times He hasn't left me, even after I've accused Him of not seeing or not caring. I remember how His lovingkindness has seen me through many other nights of fear and anxiety. I choose to have faith in Him for one simple reason. He is faithful. He always has been, He always will be.

So, even if this modern-day plague has come to our house, God's faithfulness has not waived. His love has not waived. His goodness has not waived. His protection has not waived.

He is the good shepherd. As Susie pointed out a few days ago, God's goodness and mercy don't just follow us. His goodness and mercy chase us down all the days of our life—even the scary ones.

So, today, I am not running from His goodness and mercy. Today, I am remembering. And while I am remembering, I can sit still long enough to be caught!

### Prayer Focus: Choosing to Remember, and to Thank!

Take some time today to remember God's faithfulness in your life and thank Him for it. If you like to journal, today is a good day to review them. Take some time to prayerfully stop and think of all those times He has shown up and seen you through. If you are struggling with lack of faith today, ask God to remind you, or maybe even show you for the first time, how truly faithful He has been. Choose faith by choosing to remember and thank Him. Who knows? In doing so, you may sit still long enough to be caught by His goodness and mercy too!

## #13: What Are You Clinging To?, by Susie Renzema

### Focus Verses: 14

“The Lord says, ‘I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name.’”

### Meditation:

One thing to note about this first verse is that it's the first time the Lord speaks. The first 13 verses are thought to be written by Moses, not David. He has taken these first 13 verses to tell himself, his God, and his enemy the truth. We don't necessarily know why but according to commentary, “the emphasis in this psalm is on the dangers of life.” (Wiersbe)

I can relate. You can too. Right now, everything about life feels dangerous. Things we once did without even thinking about now need to be well planned and timed to avoid danger. Something as simple as grocery shopping. The news is not good and it keeps getting worse. But, God is speaking. He is here.

And what is He saying, “I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name.” This love and protection is not a blanket love and protection, this is for His people, His children alone. “The word translated ‘love’ is not the usual word but one that means, ‘to cling to,’ to cleave, to be passionate.” (Wiersbe). It is the love God says He has for His people in Deuteronomy 7:7 and Deuteronomy 10:15. It is His love that caused Him to make Israel His people—the love that caused Him to set His affection upon them. It's the greatest of all loves because it originates with Him AND, He asks for it in return.

When I read that definition, I think of marital love, to cleave and be passionate are marital terms meant to be shared in an exclusive relationship. The Old Testament is full of metaphors of God as the husband and Israel as His wife. The book of Hosea is the lament of a brokenhearted husband over his unfaithful wife. It is an allegory of God and Israel. It is meant to be applied to us, the Church, because we are the bride of Christ.

But how does this circle back and apply to Psalm 91:14? In marriage, in my marriage, I love and trust Ron and he does the same with me. I don't look for love and trust from someone else because I bear his name. My taking his name signifies to the rest of the world that I am his and he is mine. All the rights and privileges of his name came to me when we were married. Likewise, I have a responsibility to his name as his wife, the way I act and speak and move through this world is reflective of him and his name. We bear the name of Christ and this should make a difference in how we live and move in this world too.

As we live in these days of fear and uncertainty, let me ask you, what are you clinging to? What are you passionate about right now?

Is it amassing hand sanitizer and toilet paper, or Netflix, or reading every article that comes across your computer screen, or obsessively watching the news? Maybe you're clinging to how life was before this all happened? Aren't we all doing that to some extent? I know I am. Maybe you're clinging to your spouse or your significant other or your children.

None of these can save you or protect you or even love you the way God your Father does. Cling to Him. Be passionate about pursuing Him during this forced time of stillness. Listen to Him. He is speaking to you today as surely as He spoke to the writer of Psalm 91. Trust the one who asks you to, "Cast all of your anxiety on him because he cares for you." 1 Peter 5:7

### Prayer Focus

Ask God to reveal to you what you're clinging to right now. We are still observing Lent, a time of repentance, pray and ask God to reveal what you need to let go of during this time. Ask Him for a greater passion for Him, for His Word, and for His people.

## #14: Full of Years, by Susie Renzema

### Focus Verses: 15-16

When they call on me, I will answer;  
I will be with them in trouble.  
I will rescue and honor them.  
I will reward them with a long life  
and give them my salvation.”

### Meditation:

As I read these last two verses of Psalm 91, I'm thinking about something I read in a commentary. The term “long life” doesn't necessarily mean numbers of days as much as it means quality of days. In Genesis 25:8 the Bible says “full of years” which actually means a fulfilled life.

As I was reflecting on this, I remembered a friend of my mother's who went to be with the Lord many years ago. To say that she was a difficult person would have been an understatement. She was a bitter and unhappy woman. And often that bitterness and unhappiness spilled out onto whomever she was around. She had many broken and strained relationships in her family and in her friendships. When she was diagnosed with cancer, we prayed fervently for her healing and for her life to be spared. We begged God to heal and transform her body, but He had a far better healing and transformation in mind for her.

In light of this pandemic, when I look at the term “full of years” and understand that it means a fulfilled life it makes me wonder. What kind of healing God might be wanting to do during this global health crisis in each of us?

During the time that my mom's friend was undergoing chemotherapy and radiation the Lord began to heal her soul even as her body was dying. She began to let go of bitterness, anger, and resentment. She began to let go of expectations, fears, and prejudices. She began to exercise forgiveness towards people whom she hadn't forgiven before. She began to be healed on the inside. Although God did not heal her body, she went to heaven restored, restored to her children, restored to her husband, and restored to her friends and neighbors.

I remember when she was first diagnosed having the weird question in my mind, “Will I cry when she dies?” I had seen her be so unkind to my mom. She talked behind her back, criticized her, and gossiped about our family. I didn't like her very much. She wasn't very easy to like. But as this healing and transformation took place before my eyes, my heart changed toward her in a way that I would've never expected. I can tell you that I wept openly at her death.

This is a scary time for all of us. We have been told that things are going to get worse. We've been told that we don't really know how long this is going to last. COVID-19 has already touched our church family. As I read this last verse of Psalm 91, "I will reward them with a long life and give them my salvation," what I'd like to ask you is,

For me it means practicing letting go of much more than I anticipated. Yes, we've let go of quite a few freedoms. But I'm seeing that the letting go has more to do with my soul and the heaviness it's been carrying. It has to do with repentance and forgiveness. It has to do with a change in priorities and a change of perspective. I'm praying that I'm not the same when this is over. I don't want to go back to normal. I want to be more like Jesus. I want to travel through the world lighter, less weighed down by the things that don't really matter in the divine scheme of things.

My salvation is secure because I am found in Christ, I wear the robe of righteousness and that gives me right standing before a holy and just God. That is a guarantee, how many days I have here is not. But regardless of the length of my days, I can have fullness of years. Jesus, may that be true for all of us.

### Prayer Focus: Full of Years

What would it take for you to say your life was "full of years?" What does a "full life" mean for you? As you look back on what these past few weeks have brought up in your heart, go before the Lord today and ask Him to show you what He would have you let go of during this time so you can live in the abundance He has for you.

## #15: Resting in His Shadow, by Susie Renzema

### Focus Verses: 1-2

“Those who dwell in the shelter of the most high will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This is I declare about the Lord: he alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him.”

### Meditation:

What does it mean to “dwell in the shelter of the Most High” and “find rest in the shadow of the Almighty”? To “dwell in the shelter” and “rest in the shadow” implies nearness. “We must walk very close to a companion if we would have his shadow fall on us.” (Duncan). Think about that, if you and I are walking together on a hot sunny day and I want relief from the heat, I need to stay very close to you and match you step for step. Otherwise I lose the relief of your shadow.

We have just begun a walk in the heat of the day, and it's forecasted to get even hotter in the weeks to come. God wants to provide shelter for us and His shadow of relief. But in order for us to benefit from what He has to offer, we must remain close. In a previous meditation, I said that we need to refrain from reading this Psalm like a transaction with a guarantee. These verses work a little differently. God is not promising us no hardships or pain. But, He is promising rest and shelter in the midst of hardship and pain and that is contingent on our closeness to Him.

“The most important part of a believer’s life is the part that only God sees, the ‘hidden life’ of communion and worship that is symbolized by the Holy of Holies in the Jewish sanctuary (Ex. 25:18-22)” (Wiersbe

What does the “Holy of Holies” from the Old Testament Covenant have to do with my hidden life in Christ today? The Holy of Holies was where the Ark of the Covenant was kept and where the High Priest went in (alone) to atone for the sins of God’s people. The priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy seat to obtain mercy and forgiveness for sin. By doing so, the priest was keeping the people of God close to God by removing the barrier of sin.

Today we don’t need to sacrifice the blood of animals to keep the way open between us and God. For us the way was opened up by Christ’s death on the cross and His resurrection. We stay close by practicing confession and repentance, because of our faith in Christ under the New Covenant.

We draw near to Christ, our mercy seat. “God is our refuge and strength (Ps. 46:1). He hides us and helps us and then sends us back to serve Him in the struggles of life.” (Wiersbe) And because of our nearness to Him we can declare this about the Lord, “He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him.”



Right now, being hidden and helped by the Lord might feel more painful than protective. But make no mistake. He is worthy of your trust and He intends to use you in His service. We have been given an opportunity to draw close as He has removed many of our previous obstacles. Use this time to get so close that you are resting in His shadow. It is in the resting that you will be strengthened to declare to a lost world, “He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him.”

### Prayer Focus: Resting in His Shadow

How have you been resting in the shadow of the Lord these past few weeks? Take some time today to practice sitting with the Lord. Just sitting with Him and resting in His shadow. Allow Him to refresh you in that quiet place. By all means, go ahead and practice your daily prayer routine – whether it’s praying through a list, praying what’s on your heart, or however you meet with the Lord. But today, take a little extra time to sit in a quiet place and ask the Lord to overshadow you as you rest. During that time, ask the Lord how you can take the practice of resting in His shadow and incorporate that into the rest of your day and in days to come.

## #16: Rescuing Miracles, by Becky Sytsema

### Focus Verses: 3-4

<sup>3</sup> For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease.

<sup>4</sup> He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings.  
His faithful promises are your armor and protection.

### Meditation

Last Tuesday my 21-year-old son, Nick, began coughing—hacking, really. At noon on Wednesday his temp was normal. But by 4 pm he had a fever of 103. By Thursday it spiked north of 104 and his breathing was labored. Why didn't I rush him to the hospital? Because my son also has severe autism. He is non-verbal and functions on about a 2-year-old level. Nevertheless, he has all the strength of a 6'3" linebacker-sized young man. When he becomes frightened in medical situations that he can't understand, he can become panicked and combative.

Yet his situation continued to worsen. By Friday it became clear that we had done all we could do to care for him at home. The challenges seemed overwhelming, but he needed to go to the hospital. Our trip there and his ER visit was every bit as bad as I thought it would be for him and for the staff. It took 4 of us to hold him down for his COVID-19 test. He ripped two IV lines from his arms, fought blood-pressure attempts and tried to rush out of room several times.

Nevertheless, the hospital staff and I worked hard enough to get what was needed for a diagnosis. He had bilateral pneumonia and suspected COVID-19 (which later was confirmed). Despite sedation, he had to be put in restraints to get him to his room so that he would wear a mask while being transported. But for all his adrenaline-induced strength, he was extremely sick and fighting for breath. His prognosis was very guarded. It was serious enough that Jack and I had to come face-to-face with making a decision on a DNR for him. There was a real chance he would not be coming home.

So why do I tell you all of this? Because Psalm 91 is not a guarantee that we will not face difficult times, nor that we will be spared from death. If that were the case, we would have millennia-old relatives running around! But, Psalm 91 is written about a God who has a jealous, fervent, militant love for His children. It is written about a God who is not impotent, weak, or unwilling to move on our behalf.

Saturday was a difficult day in the hospital – among the most trying in Nick's life or in mine. But he began to make some slight improvements. By the evening, his oxygen levels began to rise, his fever began to come down, and his breathing eased. On Sunday, this extremely sick young man whose life seemed to hang in the balance only 48 hours earlier, was stable enough to be discharged!

Was it a miracle? Yes. Did the medical attention he received play a role? Without a doubt. So, was it really a miracle? Yes! God rescued him. God made a way despite Nick's limitations. It was not without a good amount of struggle, effort and determination. But this remarkable recovery can't be credited to those things. God answered the prayers of hundreds who were interceding for Nick. And God has already used this story to bring hope and light in days that feel very dark to so many of us.

Today I was reminded of Revelation 12:11 which says, "And they overcame him (Satan, the accuser) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." And that is why I tell this story. This year Jack has challenged us as a congregation to "connect and tell." Not to explain away or make excuses or apologize for God when the outcome isn't what we asked or hoped for. After all, we have prayed thousands, literally thousands, of prayers for Nick over these past 21 years that have not been answered in a way we hoped for.

But we find ourselves in days when we need to overcome, and the word of our testimony has something to do with our overcoming strength. These days are requiring more of us than we could ever have imagined. We need encouragement, and we need to be committed to encouraging each other. We need to tell stories about God's faithfulness. We need to unapologetically call a miracle a miracle when we see one.

Can you remember a time when God has moved on your behalf with a miracle? Maybe you have seen something like we saw this week, and maybe you haven't. But, if you are a follower of Christ, the answer is yes! God has already moved mightily on your behalf with a miracle! God has already rescued you from something much more dire and far more permanent than COVID-19. He has rescued you from eternal death. He has rescued you from hell itself. He has made a way despite your limitations. He has fought for you and protected you even when you could not understand what was going on. Your world may have changed these past weeks, but your God has not. Connect with someone. Tell someone. Remind yourself: He rescues. He protects. He covers. He shelters. His faithful promises are your armor in this battle!

### Prayer Focus: Remember Your Rescuing Miracles

Take some time today to talk with the Lord about the miracle of salvation He has already worked for you. Thank Him for that. Ask Him to remind you of other times in your life that He has moved on your behalf despite your limitations. Thank God that He has not changed, that His faithfulness has not changed, and that you can trust Him. Then ask God to show you who needs the word of your testimony today. Telling someone of His faithfulness is a part of the overcoming strength He has provided for you today and for the days to come!

## #17: The Antidote, by Susie Renzema

### Focus Verses: 5-6

“Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night,  
nor the arrow that flies in the day.  
Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness,  
nor the disaster that strikes at midday.”

### Meditation:

Whatever the threat to the psalmist in these two verses, it is an onslaught without reprieve. There is the terror of the night, the arrow that flies in the day, the disease that stalks in darkness, and the disaster that strikes at midday. There is no rest--not even at night when he lays down to sleep.

I can relate. I remember a time when there was no respite from the fear and anxiety after my second heart attack. The fear of “what if” would wash over me at a moment’s notice and leave me almost totally unable to function. I plowed through one day after another, only finding relief when I slept at night.

Then the nightmares started. At first, they were just bad dreams. But they built in intensity until I was spending much of my late-night hours pacing my living room, trying to calm down. It was awful because no place felt safe. The terror could strike in my kitchen, or the car, or the grocery store. I never knew. I had no control over it. I shared in an earlier post that I also didn’t have a very strong faith at that time so I felt especially vulnerable.

Isn’t that how many of us are feeling right now? This virus has invaded our every waking hour. And for many of us, our every sleeping hour too. We feel vulnerable because we don’t know what’s coming next. But we’re told not to be afraid and not to dread.

What is the antidote to the kind of fear referenced in these two verses? What stops fear, terror, and destruction that comes in the night, the day, at midday, and in the darkness? A total and non-stop fear?

While meditating on these verses, I saw that this plague or attack in Psalm 91 was a non-stop kind of thing. And then I thought of the story of Daniel. In Daniel 6, King Darius’ high officers, plotting to gain the king’s favor, convinced him to sign an official decree that; “for the next 30 days any person who prays to anyone, divine or human--except you, Your Majesty--will be thrown into the den of lions.” (Daniel 6:7).

But we see in verse 10 that Daniel goes home and kneels down and prays to God with his windows open for all to see. And he does this three times a day, giving thanks to his God!

So, I ask you again. What is the antidote to the fear and anxiety, the social isolation, the loss of purpose and income from being unable to work, the boredom that's settling in? I think that it's prayer and giving thanks to God morning, noon, and night. According to Webster's, an antidote is something that relieves, prevents, or counteracts; a cure.

Last night in our Zoom Bible Study, we were asked what brings us comfort. The first thing that came to my mind was routine. What if we made prayer and giving thanks to God, even in this trying situation, part of our new routine? What if we prayed Psalm 91 three times a day and whenever our hearts feel troubled? Daniel was in grave danger as a Jewish exile, but he met his fear with prayer and thanksgiving--a powerful combination in the Old Testament and for us today.

We have yet to find a cure for COVID-19 but we do have a cure for our troubled hearts. Our cure is in a person, Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection we will celebrate in just over a week. He went to the cross to defeat every foe, every threat to your body, soul, and spirit. He is the embodiment of love and care. Talk to Him today.

### Prayer Focus: Applying the Antidote

In the middle of establishing your new normal, brand new habits for moving through your days and nights are being formed. All though many things may feel beyond your control, this is not. Now is the time to make prayer and giving thanks to God more than a passing thought on a busy day. Now is the time to intentionally create a routine of prayer. Try finding set times of prayer and weave them into the fabric of your days. Apply the antidote of purposeful prayer in the midst of your situation, whether that is looking like chaos or sheer boredom.

## #18: The Sea is Open, by Jack Sytsema

### Focus Verses: 7-8

Though a thousand fall at your side,  
    though ten thousand are dying around you,  
    these evils will not touch you.  
Just open your eyes,  
    and see how the wicked are punished.

### Meditation

God's plans often confuse and bewilder us. These days there is plenty of confusion and bewilderment in every corner of the world. The rules of society and life as we know it changed overnight. Do you find yourself sometimes wishing you could just rewind to the way things were just a few months ago? Honestly, I do. Wouldn't it be great to just go back and find a different way forward, or maybe just stay back there having never heard of COVID-19 or imagined a world of social distancing? Can't we just go back?

We aren't the first to feel that way. The Israelites felt the same way as they approached the Red Sea. They were trapped and panicked. They were asking questions like, why did God bring them into the wilderness to die? Where there not enough graves back in Egypt? Wouldn't it have been better to just remain in captivity and die in Egypt, rather than being hunted in the wilderness by their enemies?

Here's why this story reminds me of these verses in Psalm 91 that we are focusing on today. It's because right in the middle of this dire situation that seemed to have no escape for the defenseless, trapped Israelites, this was the promise of God given through Moses: "Don't be afraid. Just stand still and watch the Lord rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today will never be seen again. The Lord himself will fight for you. Just stay calm." (Ex. 14:13-14)

And how did God do it? With incredible strategy. God lead His people into this impossible situation so, "Then Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are confused. They are trapped in the wilderness!'" (Ex. 14:3). He lured the enemy into position in order to completely defeat them. But while they were in the middle of the situation, the Israelites were just as confused! They didn't see the great way of escape God planned in order to fulfill His promise of rescue and deliverance.

And, so it is with us today. These days we find ourselves easily confused, anxious, and even panicked. Why couldn't we just stay where we were? What is God thinking? And how can this possibly work out?

I don't know. But God does! The best news I have for you today is that we, the followers of Jesus Christ, are not trapped. We are not being chased down by a virus. We are not standing with a body of water in front of us, mountains on the right and left, and COVID-19 pursuing us to our destruction.

Because of what we celebrate this week through the death and resurrection of Christ, we are at peace with God. And those who are at peace with God live with a certainty that we are eternally safe. That God has made a way for us eternally.

But He has also made a way for us through this situation. We don't need to plead with God to part the Red Sea. Because we are at peace with God, we have access to every single thing we need. Why? Because God is fighting for us. That's why we can stand still and be calm. We don't have to fight. We just have to follow the path God has for us that God is making straight.

Why are we nervous now? Because we are walking through the Red Sea, looking to the right and to the left and seeing that we are in a unique time, not fully understanding what's going on or how we are getting to the other side. But God's plan is sure!

One of the beautiful things about this story is that God did not call the Israelites to walk through the Red Sea one by one. He sent them all. It's the same today. God is calling us all as a body, as a family, to go through this experience together. To cross through this difficult season, not leaving one behind. And that is why it's so important that we behave like the Body of Christ—that we work with each other, that we encourage each other, that we do all we can so that we don't isolate. We need to intentionally stay connected.

We need to go through this together. So, I encourage you to call someone – call your neighbors, your friends, maybe someone who does not yet know the Lord and ask how they are doing. Ask them questions, and listen, really listen to their answers. That is our part in ensuring that we get to the other side. That is how we all go through this modern-day Red Sea together.

### Prayer Focus: Walking Through Together

Take some time to thank God that He is the one fighting for you. Take a moment to sit quietly with the Lord and be silent. Often when we take a minute to be silent, we can sense God's peace in ways we cannot otherwise. Then ask the Lord who you should contact to encourage today.

## #19: Mercy, by Susie Renzema

### Focus Verses: 9-10

“If you make the Lord your refuge,  
if you make the Most High your shelter,  
no evil will conquer you;  
no plague will come near your home.”

### Meditation

I said last week that I take comfort in routine. It's not that I don't love spontaneity or that I feel anxious without my routine. But there is a certain comfort in keeping some aspects of my day the same regardless of where I am. My mornings, for example, are very routine. I wake up by 5:00 most days, not because I'm such a disciplined person but because I'm just wired that way and always have been. I make coffee, feed the cat, and head upstairs to my office for my quiet time. I always start the same way, no matter where I am. I get down on my knees and I pray a little prayer I learned years ago, it's called the Jesus Prayer and this is how it goes;

Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner...

That's it, one line, on my knees, on the floor. I've prayed this in hotels, in tents, in campers, in India, Israel, Norway, on cruise ships, if I'm there, I'm on the floor. Why? Because I need to be reminded daily who I am in relation to God. He is the Christ, the Son of God and I am a sinner in need of his mercy, every day. Someone once asked me why I would say that every day when Jesus came to make me an overcomer of my sin. "Isn't it kind of defeatist" she asked? I don't think so. I see it as a practice in humility, a reminder of who is really in control.

“If men do not understand the law, they will not feel that they are sinners. And if they are not consciously sinners, they will never value the sin offering. There is no healing a man till the law has wounded him, no making him alive till the law has slain him.” Charles Spurgeon

And if He's in control, then where else would I take refuge? Where else would I go for shelter? A refuge is a place that provides shelter or protection, a haven, a retreat, or a sanctuary. It's a place of relief, a place where we let out a sigh and feel relieved to finally be there. And it's accessible to us no matter where we are, no matter what we're going through--because it's not a place but a person. It's Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the giver of grace, and the bestower of endless mercy.

Right now we have two very big things going on at the same time, we are in Holy Week and we are sheltering in place during a global pandemic. There is something in the combination of those



two things that intrigues me. Holy Week and Easter are the biggest events in the church calendar, bigger than Christmas believe it or not. Christianity is what it is because of what we commemorate in the happenings of this week. Jesus was unjustly tried and crucified for the sole purpose of making a way for you and me to have unlimited access to God through his broken and bloodied body.

The reason I can run for refuge to the shelter in verse 9 is only, and always be, because of what Jesus did on the cross. The reason I have hope that, “no evil will conquer me and no plague will come near my home.” It is because of who my Lord is. And the assurance I have, even if I am not spared evil or plague, is that “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” because I am His child, and He never forgets His own.

So, why do I pray every day, “Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner...”? Because the whole gospel is in that sentence. He is the Christ, God is His Father, I am a sinner, I need mercy.... And because of His great love for me--love that chose me and set me apart while I was still lost in my sin--I will receive the mercy I ask for.

So will you. Just ask.

### Prayer Focus: One-Line Prayer

Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner...

Take some time, not just to say the words, but to truly ponder the magnitude of this prayer. What does that truly mean for you? Both for today and into eternity? And what can that mean for those around you who do not yet know the Lord?

## #20: #JesusChangedMyLife, by Becky Sytsema

### Focus Verses: 11-12

For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go.  
They will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.

### Meditation

My home church growing up was Lake Avenue Congregational Church in Pasadena, California, pastored by Ray Ortlund. He was a great teacher then and he still is. Just today I came across this one minute video he shared on his social media (with the hashtag #JesusChangedMyLife). I love what he said:

“Jesus is really good at miracles. Miracles are not flukes. Miracles are normal. We are immersed in miracles. The universe is an ongoing miracle. The risen Jesus Himself is a living miracle. The real question is not, ‘is change possible,’ or, ‘can I actually experience God in a way that alters my reality?’ The question is, ‘are we open?’ In this life, we can experience substantial healing. In eternity, we will experience perfect healing. But the question is, are we open enough right now to humble ourselves to whatever the Lord wants to do in us? Or, are we in effect asking him to be the chaplain to our status quo?”

On our last round of meditations through Psalm 91, I shared a story from our family about angels (if you missed it, [you can see it here](#)). I had some great responses from sharing the story. And my own faith was boosted as I recounted it. Why? Because there is power in our testimonies. In fact, our testimonies are important weapons we have in defeating the enemy. Revelation 12:11 says, “And they have defeated [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by their testimony.”

Hearing about how God has worked in one another's lives has a real effect on our own faith. Knowing what God has done for others helps us to have faith in what God can do for us. And, there is a real benefit for ourselves in remembering our own stories too. It helps us come to a place where we can begin to truly ask the Lord what it is that He wants to do for us. It helps us stop asking Him “to be the chaplain to our status quo,” and trust Him, instead, to be our Lord.

That is why I love a powerful trend that Reality Church in LA started for this Easter season. It has also been picked up by The Gospel Coalition and others. What is it? “The idea is simple. We want to mobilize Christians across the world to proclaim the good news of Jesus by testifying on social media to how he changed their life. We want people all over the world—quarantined in their homes and scrolling on their phones—to see a flood of stories about how the resurrected Jesus brings purpose and meaning and hope.” (taken from [thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org)).

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you have a testimony. People need to hear it! And you need to tell it! So, I'd like to invite you to strengthen your own faith, boost the faith of others, and perhaps help someone come to faith for the first time by participating in this wonderful challenge for the Easter season. Here's how:

1. **Create** a one- to two-minute video of yourself sharing your testimony of how Jesus changed your life. Here are some [tips on how to tell your story](#), as well as [selfie video best practices](#) (see also [here](#)). Include an invitation at the end of your video for others to believe in Jesus, and welcome them to follow up with you or another Christian community for help in this difficult season. If you don't want to share a video of yourself, feel free to just write your testimony in a social-media post!
2. **Share** the video on social media starting the Monday of Easter Week (April 6). Be sure to use hashtag #JesusChangedMyLife and tag your church's social-media handle in your post (e.g. #JesusChangedMyLife @LakeEffectCh) so people can learn more about Jesus through a local church.
3. **Let us know!** If you choose to participate, please let us know once you've posted it.

In this moment of fear and darkness in our world, believers have a unique opportunity to proclaim hope and offer light. We don't know what will happen in our world in the next few months, but we do know what happened on Calvary 2000 years ago. We don't know everything God is doing in the COVID-19 crisis, but we do know what Jesus has done for us.

Let's tell that story.

Prayer Focus: [#JesusChangedMyLife](#)

This is a wonderful evangelistic opportunity in this Easter season and during a time of fear in our world. Pray that the resurrection power of Jesus on display in these videos would inspire many to tune into a service on Easter and begin their own #JesusChangedMyLife journeys.

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Portions of this article are taken from Reality LA and The Gospel Coalition.

For more information, please visit:

[Reality LA](#)

[The Gospel Coalition](#)

## #21: The Art of Serpent-Stomping, by Becky Sytsema

### Focus Verse: 13

You will trample upon lions and cobras;  
you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet!

### Meditation

Growing up as a missionary kid to parents who spent many years in the Amazon jungle of Bolivia, there was no shortage of snake stories. Amazing, creepy crawly, squishy, yucky snake stories. Snakes of all sizes with deadly venomous or constricting potential falling through thatched roofs in the middle of the night, or slithering through outhouses during, well, particularly vulnerable moments. My parents overcame (or out ran) every snake. And, apparently, my mom could make soup or crispy appetizers out of any of them! (Thankfully, I was born in the much tamer and less slithery foothills of the Andes.)

Despite realizing that my face hurts from the involuntary contortions I make while listening to most snake stories, when it comes to the serpents in Psalm 91:13, I only smile. I feel a deep sense of peace and satisfaction knowing that this overcoming, trampling power is not just a promise. It's a guarantee in the lives of the followers of Christ.

Although there are times when actual serpents are trampled (and likely lions, but missionary kids from Africa would have to verify that), this verse isn't referring to the literal. This verse sends me back to Genesis 3:15 when we first glimpse God's rescue plan. He promised Adam and Eve (and all of humanity) that a Redeemer would come and crush the head of the serpent. This verse sends me forward to Romans 16:20 with God's eternal fulfillment of His rescue plan: "And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly."

I recently read (although I don't remember where) that believers who love to read the Bible and give themselves to its story, develop what is called a "canonical consciousness." That means the more we read the Bible and allow ourselves to be captured by it, the more we see how our own journeys are reflected in, and even shaped by, the beauty of God's Word. We see it not just as a book filled with history, parables, and poetry, but as our living, dynamic true North whose every page holds meaning, promise and relevance for us today.

So, when we read verses like Psalm 91:13, we can take it as a guarantee for victory. Because Jesus trampled Satan (who is often referred to in Scripture as a serpent or a devouring lion), we also, through Christ Jesus, have that same power. We can undo Satan's evil plans for our destruction through sin, addiction, broken or wrong relationships, sickness—even pandemics.

But we can't do it on our own. Don't be deceived into thinking that you alone are smarter or stronger than our enemy. The Serpent has been defeating humans since the first of our kind walked this earth. But through the power of Christ who has already defeated our foe, Psalm 19:13 becomes our guarantee that Satan is the one who lives trampled under our feet!

Yesterday we celebrated Easter. It probably looked different for most of us this year as we sheltered in place. For many, it didn't feel very "Easter-y." There were no gatherings, no sunrise services, no big family dinners, and no way to show off our new spring outfits. For a good number of us, the day was filled with more questions than answers, more confusion than clarity, more disappointment than joy.

The same was true of Jesus' followers on that first Easter morning. They were also sheltering in place, afraid of what lie beyond their locked door. And yet it was into that situation, when their lives had radically changed in just a few days, that their serpent-stomping, lion-crushing Redeemer came into their midst with a victory they already had, but could not yet imagine.

For us, any feelings of doubt or fear because of these new uncertainties, or disappointments over missed traditions of Easter, don't change the certainty of our complete rescue. No matter what emotions we felt yesterday, or what we are waking up to this morning, the truth of what we celebrate--the definitive, eternal victory of our Lord—isn't even slightly affected by current world events. Today, take some time to meet with your serpent-stomping, lion-crushing Redeemer who has already secured your victory, whether or not you can imagine it.

### Prayer Focus: The Practice of Serpent-Stomping

Every minute you spend in prayer meeting with the One who has already secured your victory puts a deeper divot in the head of your enemy. Whether you sit in quiet contemplation, or shout at the top of your lungs, His defeat is equally certain. His head is being crushed. Spend some time today praising your savior, and thanking Him that no matter what you may be feeling today, His truth has not changed. As you do, you will be practicing the Psalm 91:13 art of serpent-stomping.

## #22: In Need of Comfort, by Susie Renzema with Becky Sytsema

### Focus Verses: 14

The Lord says, "If you love me and truly know who I am,  
I will rescue you and keep you safe. (CEV)

### Meditation

Throughout these meditations, we have talked a lot about the rescue God gives to the followers of Christ. This verse includes the phrase, "and keep you safe." To "keep" is absolutely about protection and rescue. But the word implies something more. To keep means to take care of, to minister to, to tend, to support, to remedy. This militant, rescuing God of Psalm 91 is also the tender Shepherd of Psalm 23. He is the God who knows that we not only need rescuing, we need reassuring. We need rest and security. We need comfort. Especially now.

The God of all comfort is able to calm our fears and anxieties. It is one of the many ways He keeps us.

Given the continued situation with COVID-19, I need to stay grounded in the Word, remembering continually where my help really comes from, and where I must turn with my runaway thoughts. I need now more than ever to truly know Him, as Psalm 91:14 reminds us.

We have 17 days left in April; 17 days left (hopefully) of sheltering at home. During this time, let's choose to draw on the strength that comes through the promise of God's comfort. So, in addition to our Psalm 91 meditations, here is a Scripture journaling plan that takes us through the end of the month. I hope you will spend some time each day allowing the Lord to minister to you through these passages. I pray that we are nearing the end of this strange season, and that all of you are well physically, mentally, and most important, spiritually.

April 14: Isaiah 35:4

April 15: Matthew 6: 25-34 (Journal the verse of your choice)

April 16: Philippians 4: 6-7

April 17: Psalm 119: 75-77

April 18: Isaiah 66: 12-13

April 19: 2 Corinthians 1: 3-7

April 20: Philippians 2: 1-2

April 21: Isaiah 51: 12-16 (Journal verse 12)

April 22: John 14: 27

April 23: Joshua 1: 9

April 24: Psalm 23: 4

April 25: Psalm 34: 4-7

April 26: Psalm 94: 19  
April 27: Romans 8: 38-39  
April 28: Deuteronomy 31:6  
April 29: Isaiah 41:10, 13  
April 30: Psalm 56: 3-4  
\*Bonus Verse\* Psalm 46: 1

### Prayer Focus: Taking Comfort in the God Who Rescues

Say to those with fearful hearts,  
“Be strong, and do not fear,  
for your God is coming to destroy your enemies.  
He is coming to save you.” Isaiah 35:4

Take some time with the Lord today pondering this verse and allowing Him to minister His comfort to your heart.

Scripture Journaling Plan: God of All Comfort (18 Day) can be found in Section 2, page 111

## #23: Practicing Trust, by Becky Sytsema

### Focus Verse: 15

When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble.  
I will rescue and honor them.

### Meditation:

I was a better wife before I was married. Back then marriage looked like a romantically simple progression of two people whose affection and love for one another would move them through life in unison. There would be a beautiful wedding and everything after that would come naturally. We would instinctively know what each other wanted and needed, and happily provide those things. But romance doesn't account for two unique individuals with their own opinions, anger triggers, personalities, traditions, expectations, love languages, past traumas and even belief structures trying to live together in the same space. It doesn't come naturally and it doesn't always feel right.

In the same way, I was a better mother before I had children. Again, I had romantic notions of adoring little faces looking to me with complete trust in my wisdom, my skills, and even my motives; showing gratitude for my generosity and selflessness. I was sure I could give my child the exact right blend of love and discipline that would result in exemplary offspring. But, again, my romantic view of parenthood didn't take into account the utter frustration, exhaustion, anger, worry, and complete insufficiency I would experience in caring for tiny (and eventually not-so-tiny) humans whose personalities, attitudes and challenges grew with them. They could push buttons I didn't even know I had. I encountered difficulties that I never imagined when I was carrying dolls around. Turns out that they weren't who I imagined, but neither was I.

So, here we are at Psalm 91:15, which challenges us to pray, believing God will answer. It calls on us to trust Him, that He will be with us in trouble, and that He will rescue us and honor us. But like marriage and parenthood, trusting in God seems straight forward and easily done— right up until we actually have to do it--right up until we are staring at unimaginable circumstances, feeling broken and inadequate. It can leave us wondering if God is really there, or if He really sees us, or if He even cares. The promises no longer feel real.

When we first come to Christ, it's easy to read passages filled with promises and have a romantic view of being a Christ-follower. It's simple to assume that we've just entered into a life free of struggle, strife, sickness, or financial challenges. Faith and trust seem easy, even natural. But as difficulties, disagreements, deaths, and unexpected circumstances (like pandemics) swirl around us, trusting in God doesn't feel so natural anymore. We experience



doubt, disillusionment, fear, anxiety, even panic. I want to be clear. I do not believe these feelings are sinful, wrong, or even off-putting to God. And it's important to truthfully acknowledge them to ourselves and to God. Feelings are what they are. No more, no less.

But here's the bottom line. Trust is not a feeling. It's something we choose. Over and over and over. We can't decide how we will feel. But we can decide if we are going to act based on those feelings, or if we are going to dig down to something deeper than our worry or fear.

Just as marriage and parenthood take practice and commitment, so does choosing to fix our eyes on the Lord, and believing that He will keep His promises despite what is going on around us. It takes maturing. Trust is a process. Trust is a journey.

Neither marriage nor parenthood looked at all like my romantic ideas. But looking at it now through more mature eyes, I have to say, it's so much better. There has been a satisfaction and joy that only comes as a result of a long journey taken with those whom I love and who love me. I've learned that the view from the top of a mountain I have struggled to climb is so much more majestic, so much more deeply personal, and so much more fulfilling than a romantically filtered picture of a mountain top viewed from a world away.

It may take some practice to learn to trust God fully. But it's in these days of uncertainty that our opportunity for growth and maturing is most fertile, and most fruitful. Now is the time to drop romantic views of how easy God should be making our lives. Now is the time to practice trust; clinging to the God who will journey with us bringing satisfaction, comfort and life to our souls in ways we cannot yet imagine.

God doesn't promise a life free of troubles, like those we are experiencing right now. But He does promise that He will be with us in the midst of it. And He promises that there is another side – a beautiful other side. If you are a follower of Jesus, these troubled days have no impact on your outcome. John Calvin once wrote, "The salvation of God extends far beyond the narrow boundary of earthly existence; and it is to this, whether we live or come to die, that we should principally look." So, take some time learning to practice your trust in God. Your eternity is secure. You have nothing to lose. But know this: the view at the end of this journey is far, far beyond what you can imagine today.

### Prayer Focus: Practice, Practice, Practice

Take some time to sit with the Lord today. Tell Him how you feel, no matter what that may be. And then take some time to practice trusting Him despite your feelings. Here are some passages to help you: [1 Thessalonians 5:24](#); [2 Peter 3:9](#); [Nahum 1:7](#); [Proverbs 3:26](#); [Isaiah 43:2](#); [Psalm 138:7](#); [2 Corinthians 4:8,9](#)

## #24: Receiving Comfort, by Susie Renzema

Focus Verse: 16

“I will reward them with a long life and give them my salvation.”

### Meditation

While reading the other day, I noticed a bookmark in my Bible that I didn't remember placing there. I turned over just a few pages to Psalm 116 and I was struck by verses 1 and 2 in particular:

“I love the Lord because he hears my voice  
and my prayer for mercy.  
Because he bends down to listen,  
I will pray as long as I have breath.”

In an earlier meditation I talked about the tension I feel in Psalm 91 because God's promises can be viewed like a formula or transaction. At first glance I see these two verses in a similar way, however, this time the responsibility is mine. “I will pray as long as I have breath.” And why? “...because He hears my voice...Because He bends down to listen.” The thought of that tenderness washed over me and brought such comfort.

As I went back and reread Psalm 91, a thought occurred to me. This Psalm sounds like a deliverance psalm. Psalm 116: 1-2 sounds like comfort psalm. Deliverance and comfort are two very different things, but they aren't mutually exclusive. I can be comforted because I have been delivered or I can be comforted despite not being delivered. Deliverance is liberation or rescue; it's to be set free from a particular calamity or undesired situation. Right now I want deliverance from this virus. We all do. We want to be rescued and set free to resume our normal lives. But for whatever reason that isn't happening, God is, however, providing us with comfort. Comfort is to give strength and hope to, to ease the grief or trouble of (Websters).

After I had my first heart attack, I desperately wanted deliverance. I wanted my doctors to tell me exactly what to do and I wanted them to guarantee it would never happen again. Of course, I didn't get what I wanted. No doctor can make those kinds of promises. The other thing I desperately wanted was to talk to another young woman with small children who had gone through the same thing as I. I wanted the comfort of knowing I wasn't alone.

Instead I got cardiac rehab a couple of days a week. A dozen or so men and women old enough to be my grandparents plodding along on treadmills and telling me their stories while simultaneously trying to grandparent me. I was not comforted. I looked at them and saw all

the differences and none of the similarities. I rationalized that they could be more at peace with their near-death experiences because they had raised their children and lived their lives. I stopped going.

My family and friends tried and did love me well during that time, but I had set my mind on this one thing that would bring me peace and comfort--finding someone just like me. As long as it eluded me, I had none of what I craved. Comfort and peace stayed just beyond my grasp and I had given up on deliverance altogether.

And so, I've had to ask myself, am I doing that in this situation? Am I so focused on deliverance that I'm missing the daily, hourly comfort I'm receiving? And if I am, what do I do to change that? Look at Psalm 116:13; "I will lift up the cup of salvation and praise the Lord's name for saving me." The cup of salvation is, "an act of worship (meaning) to utter blessings, and thanksgiving, and prayers (to God) and then to drink the cup which the Lord has filled with his saving grace." *Worship, blessing, thanksgiving, and prayer*, my comfort comes from these disciplines. And as I practice them, I am delivered daily--from despair, and fear, and boredom, and anger, and grief.

But how can I praise the Lord's name for saving me when I'm still in the midst of the storm? Doesn't the praise come after the deliverance? Look at verse five; "How kind the Lord is! How good he is! So merciful this God of ours!" Jesus and his disciples sang *this psalm* during the Last Supper, *before* his arrest, trial, beating and crucifixion! "He testified to the truth that God was gracious, righteous, and merciful before, during, and after his ordeal." (Guzik)

I wish I was standing in front of you right now because in my heart I'm more of a teacher than a writer, and I just can't seem to convey the enormity of this, but I'll try. Jesus knew the absolute horror of what was coming *and yet* he testified to the truth that God is gracious, righteous, and merciful even though what he was about to experience would be void of all those things.

When He hung on the cross and took full force the wrath of God there was no grace or mercy for Him but only the exacting standard of God's righteousness. But here's what I think and it's why I have hope and where I find comfort. He could testify that God is gracious, righteous, and merciful because he saw forward to you and me standing in grace and mercy, righteous before the Father. Fully loved and adopted brothers and sisters of His for eternity! He sang and rejoiced in the cross because of what it would produce - a harvest of souls. That's our deliverance, that's our comfort!

### Prayer Focus: Gratitude

Gratitude is a powerful antidote to fear and anger. Make a gratitude list and pray through it. Pray Psalm 116 in gratitude for all God has done and continues to do for you. And if your soul is feeling particularly weary today, worship Him! When we worship God, when we offer a sacrifice of praise, the enemy flees, and our souls are strengthened.

## #25: He Hears, He Sees, He Loves, by Susie Renzema

### Focus Verses: 1-2

Those who live in the shelter of the Most High  
will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

<sup>2</sup>This I declare about the LORD:

He alone is my refuge, my place of safety;  
he is my God, and I trust him.

### Meditation

Yesterday, in our sermon, Jack preached about Hagar and the time when she fled into the wilderness to get away from Sarai, her mistress, who had been mistreating her due to jealousy over not being able to bear a child. Genesis 16: 7-15 tells the beautiful story of a pregnant, broken-hearted Hagar impulsively running away to escape this abusive treatment. But, typical of when we run away from our problems instead of facing them, she finds herself alone and afraid in the wilderness. And it's here, in this desolate and frightening place, that she encounters the greatest comfort known to any and all of us.

Verse 7 says, "the angel of the Lord found Hagar." And in being found by the angel of the Lord she receives the comfort that only the Lord can bring. The angel of the Lord did not fix her situation, but he told her that, "the Lord has heard your cry of distress." She was heard by God Himself and in hearing her He dispatched an angel to attend to her and to encourage her to go back to her mistress and submit to her authority.

I have always loved this story. I love that its main point is that God hears and sees us in our pain and distress and He never leaves us alone in the wilderness, even when our own choices put us there. God wants her to never forget that He is the God who hears her, and so, through the angel she is directed to name her son Ishmael which means, God hears (v.11).

Another thing I love about this story is the personal nature of Hagar's relationship with God after this wilderness encounter. Just as God gave a name to her son that would remind her of His attention toward her, she then gives God a new name of remembrance.

"Thereafter, Hagar used another name to refer to the Lord who had spoken to her.  
She said, 'You are the God who sees me.'" (v.13)

Remembrance is woven all through Psalm 91 as well. Verse 2 starts out, "This I declare about the Lord..." A good question to ask ourselves right now is, "what am I declaring about the Lord in this situation?" There's a popular saying, "Don't forget in the dark what you've seen in the

light.” Right now, for many, this feels like darkness--like we’re groping about trying to find our way and no one can tell us where the end is. And when you’ve spent too much time in the dark, the lies of the enemy start to sound more and more like the truth. This is why immersing ourselves in the Word is so important. Especially now.

And like in the story of Hagar, God is still sending His angels of protection (see Psalm 91:11-13) and He is still listening, “When they call on me, I will answer, I will be with them in trouble.” In the story of Hagar, she learned two very important things about her God, our God. He not only hears, He sees. If He only heard, He would be dependent on our rendering of any given situation and that would limit His ability to act on our behalf because we are flawed. Even the most honest of us could never tell our story to Him with full accuracy. And if He only saw, He would also be limited because He wouldn’t know all that’s held in our heart in a given situation. BUT, He is the God who hears and sees, and beyond that, He is the God who always acts for my good and His glory.

Over and over I keep returning to a quote by Charles Spurgeon,

“remember this, had any other condition been better for you than the one in which you are, divine love would have put you there.”

Divine love has put us here. That’s really hard to understand and it challenges our concept of the goodness of God. But this is what I learned in the light: He is good, He loves me, He hears me, He sees me, He is always acting on my behalf as His adopted child, as His treasured possession. I will not forget these things in the dark.

“For this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” 2 Corinthians 4:17.

“An eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” I can’t even fathom what that may be but I know this, it is worth whatever God deems necessary to get me there.

### Prayer Focus: Reminding Ourselves that He Hears

On page 112 is a Scripture journaling plan I wrote in April of 2018. I had been working my way through Genesis and was overcome by the story of Hagar as never before. God impressed on me the personal nature of His love for me by reminding me that His ear is always turned toward my cries. All 29 verses are on how God hears us. Pray your way through these or just talk to God honestly about how you’re feeling in this wilderness, He wants to hear your heart, pour it out to the God who hears you.

## #26: A Snake in the Leaves, by Becky Sytsema

### Focus Verse: 3

For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler  
and from the deadly pestilence.

### Meditation

When I was a kid, I loved Sunday evening TV. The Wonderful World of Disney followed by Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom – now, that was the good stuff! Especially Wild Kingdom. I was always captivated by the beauty of this vast world God spoke into being. The immense diversity, the delicate balance, yet amazing resilience of life – whether majestic or microscopic. All of it intrigued me. These days I am still mesmerized by God's boundless creativity, and my favorite channel is easily National Geographic Wild. But admittedly, it's a bit hard for me to watch predatory scenes of a poor hapless fawn wandering a little too far from its mom only to be ambushed by a tiger, or of a sea turtle swimming to the water's surface for a breath of air, unaware of the shark darting up from the depths below. (That one is particularly hard for someone like me who stops to rescue turtles from the road.)

Here in Psalm 91:3, the "snare of the fowler" creates a similar image – that of an unsuspecting bird going about its business, becoming suddenly and unexpectedly caught in a trap it could not detect, and from which escape seems impossible. This symbolic imagery is used several times in throughout the Bible. It's a vivid metaphor for Satan's secret and subtle methods of attack and entrapment.

But almost like the traps themselves, I think we are often unaware of God's rescue, and may even resent the method of deliverance He chooses to rescue us. Here's what I mean. Let's suppose that a fowler has set a trap. He hides the trap with leaves and then sets out some tempting treat to lure the bird into the trap. A bird happens by, sees the treat, and, with singular focus, locks its sights on the yummy lure. Hiding near that same pile of leaves is a hungry snake who, upon seeing the yummy bird, positions itself to strike. But the sudden movement of the snake rustles the leaves just enough to interrupt the bird's focus on its own lunch and startle it into flying away.

While flying away, the bird thinks that the encounter with the snake only served to rob it of the free meal it came so close to enjoying. The bird never realizes that the snake's presence actually rescued it from a deadly trap that would have been triggered by the bird's own appetites. In reality, the bird was able to react to the threat that it could see and understand, never realizing that it was spared from a far more sinister and deadly threat that it couldn't see.

The older I get the more convinced I am that we often don't perceive the ways God is rescuing us from dangers we have no idea even exist. We tend to see the snake in the leaves and feel cheated, never realizing that the free lunch wasn't God's provision stolen from us. The snake that prevented us from eating the free lunch was actually God's provision to rescue us. We don't see it because we don't think God would ever use a snake to rescue us. I mean, after all, isn't the snake the enemy?

Honestly, these days I feel far more inclined to take Scriptures of faith and trust in God at face value. Scriptures like:

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding"  
(Prov 3:5).

"And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you" (Ps 9:10).

"They do not fear bad news; they confidently trust the LORD to care for them"  
(Ps 112:7).

"For we live by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor 5:7).

So now we come to COVID-19. This situation has been almost surreal in how quickly it has hit the reset button on our lives, our communities, our churches, our nation, our world. But I have grown more and more to wonder, are we tending to see the snake that cheated out of "life as we knew it," rather than trusting God for a greater rescue from something we cannot even perceive? God's heavenly perspective is far more comprehensive than ours. So, could God be using this difficult and frightening situation as a catalyst to get our attention away from distractions that could trap us? Can He be going even beyond a rescue and setting the stage for us to stop and focus long enough to experience true personal renewal and corporate revival?

I don't know what God is doing. I don't know where all of this is heading. I don't know what things will look like on the other side of this. But here's what I do know. I have an enemy who delights in setting traps to ensnare me, and I have a God who can be trusted to rescue me from them. I believe that not simply because I have read it here in Psalm 91 (although that should be enough). I believe it because I have experienced it in my life—*whether I've known it or not*. If you are a follower of Christ and committed your life to Him, this is your guarantee: God's hand is on your life and, come what may, your future is firmly established and your eternal rescue is secure. Your God can be trusted! He will rescue you, even if all you see today is a snake in the leaves!

## Prayer Focus: Thanking God for His Snakes

Take time to sit with the Lord today and thank Him for His rescue, even if you haven't perceived it. Focus on the trust verses listed above, and maybe find some others and thank God for how He has fulfilled His promise to you even when you didn't know He was doing it! And be assured, He *is* doing it!



## #27: His Wingspan, by Susie Renzema

### Focus Verse: 4

“He will cover you with his feathers.  
He will shelter you with his wings.  
His faithful promises are your armor and protection.”

### Meditation

A couple of summers ago a neighbor told me that we had a bald eagle that had taken up residence on our lake. Its nest was high up in a very large tree on a vacant lot to the east of our house. I had never seen a bald eagle, other than in pictures, so I was eager to get even a glimpse. One day, while out on my deck on a beautiful sunny morning, rather abruptly I was standing in a shadow. I looked up expecting to see a passing cloud, instead I saw our eagle floating above me on the breeze. I was stunned at the size of this bird and the breadth of its wings - broad enough to cast a shadow over me! I was so fascinated, I had to know more about this beautiful creature. I learned that the average wingspan of an eagle is between 7 and 9 feet. I also learned that their wings are very strong, strong enough to carry heavy loads upon them as they fly and, as such, they are a symbol of strength and endurance.

So, when I look at Psalm 91:4, I see that the psalmist used this imagery as a means of comfort that would bring confidence. Being covered with His feathers and sheltered by His wings is our armor and protection and, I might add, our healing.

While rereading the psalm, I did a Google search on wings in the Bible, the first verse that came up was Malachi 4:2, “But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. And you will go free, leaping with joy like calves let out to pasture.” This reminded me of one of my favorite stories in the New Testament, the story of the woman with the issue of blood, told in the gospels of Matthew 9; Mark 5; and Luke 8.

This woman had been bleeding for 12 years, and in Jewish society that meant 12 years of being ceremonially unclean. That meant 12 years of social isolation. Can you even imagine that? We have been in semi-isolation for 39 days and many of us are losing it. But this woman hadn't been out among others for 12 years! To be unclean for this length of time was to be as good as dead. To say she was desperate would be a gross understatement!

But God... This woman, we never even learn her name, is a woman of faith and when she hears that Jesus is coming to town hope rises up within her. She has tried everything. We learn that she has spent all of her money on doctors and cures and she is totally out of options. Jesus is her one and only chance. According to Matthew 9:21, she says, “... if only I touch the hem of His garment, I shall be made well.”

Why the hem of His garment? It goes back to Malachi 4:2, "...the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings." The wings referred to here are the fringes or tassels on the four corners of a Jewish man's prayer shawl (see Numbers 15: 37-41). The tassels were a reminder to the Jews of their deliverance from the bondage and slavery of Egypt, and a reminder to keep the commandments given to them by God in the wilderness. All that they needed to prosper and flourish in the promised land was provided in the Commandments. And if they kept them, a long and fruitful life was promised to them. And, in Malachi 4:2 the Sun of Righteousness is Jesus Christ, so this woman knew that in order to prosper and flourish she needed to be healed. And that healing was only found in the wings of the Sun of Righteousness - Jesus Christ. That is why she reached out for the hem of his garment and that act of faith did, in fact, heal her.

There is yet no healing for this virus, but there is absolutely healing for our weary souls in the midst of it, and it's only found under His wings. He is strong and His wingspan is vast, there is space enough to cover all who would come to find shelter. Don't stay on the fringes of the crowd any longer, tuck under and see that, "His faithful promises are your armor and protection" but only if He is to you the Sun of Righteousness.

### Prayer Focus: Those Not Yet Under His Wings

Continue to pray for those in your life who are living outside the family of God, those who are not tucked under His wings. Pray fervently for the lost, this is an opportune time to share the hope you have with them. Pray for the courage and the opportunity to do so.

## #28: Night Terrors, by Susie Renzema

### Focus Verse: 5

Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night,  
nor the arrow that flies in the day.

### Meditation

When our son, Chris, was a senior in high school we took him and his friend to Orlando for Spring Break. The plan was to spend the week in the sun, hitting theme parks, eating junk food, and staying up late watching movies. What we didn't plan on was, "the terrors of the night," or more specifically, night terrors.

"Night terrors are episodes of intense screaming, crying, thrashing or fear during sleep that happen again and again, usually in children ages 3-12. They occur during the deepest phase of non-REM sleep and can be accompanied by fast heart rate, fast breathing, sweating, and dilated pupils. It is not uncommon for the child to be unaware of the parents' presence or attempts to comfort or awaken them." (WebMD)

One night we were awoken suddenly by a loud crashing sound followed by screaming and the sound of our son yelling at and running after his friend. When we got out to the living room Chris' friend was in a full screaming panic trying to get out onto the balcony of our 4th floor condo. It took every bit of strength Ron and Chris had, along with a broken screen door, to keep him from the balcony. And through it all, he never woke up! When he finally did, he looked confused and humiliated. It broke my heart to hear his embarrassed apology. It also put a damper on the rest of our trip as we all went to bed the remaining nights wondering if it would happen again. It did, but not nearly as intensely as that first time.

As I meditated on the first line of this verse a number of things came to me. First of all, it says, "Do not be *afraid* of the *terrors* of the night." But what are the terrors we're not to be afraid of?

The word *terror* comes from the Hebrew word *pahad* and it means, "a (sudden) alarm (properly the object feared, by implication the *feeling*) *dread*, great fear, *thing greatly feared* (*Hebrew - Greek Key Word Study Bible*, emphasis mine).

What struck me was that this word seems to be more about a perceived fear than an actual threat. This is the fear of "what if" that we all know so well, and the darkest hours of the night are when we are the most vulnerable to the "what ifs."

The word “night” is also intentionally used here and comes from the Hebrew “*layil*” which primarily describes the portion of day between sunset and sunrise. However, figuratively, it signifies the *gloom* or *despair* that sometimes *engulfs* the human heart from an *absence of divine guidance!*” (*Hebrew - Greek Key Word Study Bible*)

So, if I were to rewrite that line it might say, “Do not be afraid of the what if, worst case, perceived fears that come from the absence of divine guidance.” This is a battle of the mind and heart more than an actual threat.

What is divine guidance and how do we get it? We are divinely guided by God’s Word. But right now, how many of us are being more guided by the news and social media than by God’s Word? It’s coming at us constantly and if we don’t manage it, it will surely manage us. When we first started sheltering, I noticed something. I started my day in the usual way, coffee and quiet time. Then I would do some work around the house and by lunchtime I was back on my laptop reading throughout the afternoon. After dinner I’d escape into the TV, which usually included some news. By the time I was getting ready for bed I’d be awash in a sense of foreboding. It was as if all the perceived fears of the day had accumulated and were demanding my attention. And you know what? I was no match for them because I had not properly guarded my heart and mind throughout the day.

Philippians 4:6-7 says, “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.”

So, the only hope for my wayward feelings and demanding thoughts is the peace of Christ. And the Greek word for peace in this verse is *eirēnē* which means, “peace of mind, tranquility, arising from reconciliation with God and a sense of divine favor” (*Hebrew - Greek Key Word Study Bible*). Every worry and fear I have, real or perceived, I can take to God because I am reconciled to Him by the blood of Christ and I have divine favor because I am His child. It’s that peace, that knowledge, that ultimately guards my heart and mind during this season of great unknowing.

Returning to the last line of the WebMD definition of night terrors; “It is not uncommon for the child to be *unaware* of the parents’ *presence* or *attempts to comfort* or awaken them.” I have to ask myself, am I that child? Am I so busy thrashing and screaming that I’m completely unaware of my Father’s presence and attempts to comfort me? Am I missing His peace because I’ve forgotten to be grateful, and I’m complaining rather than praying?

People keep referring to this time as a giant wake-up call. If that’s the case, then we are not alone in the terror. Our perfect parent is right here with us offering His presence and His comfort.

## Prayer Focus: Becoming Aware

Take some time away from the discomfort and uncertainty of the day to sit in the Lord's presence and talk to Him. Choose to be consciously aware of His presence with you. Let Him comfort and reassure you. This is a learned skill that takes time, so keep practicing it.

## #29: Sheltering in Place, by Becky Sytsema

### Focus Verse: 6

Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness,  
nor the disaster that strikes at midday.

### Meditation

Back in 2004, Jack and I were considering moving from Colorado to Melbourne, Florida. I remember my very first question: what about hurricanes? We were reassured by a life-long Floridian that Melbourne was only 20 minutes south of Cape Canaveral. He told us that NASA strategically chose that part of Florida because the atmospheric conditions right there made direct hurricane strikes unlikely.

As it turns out, either he was naïve in making that statement, or we were naïve in believing him! We moved in January, 2004. By the end of that year, we had been directly impacted by Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne. In fact, “this was the first time four tropical cyclones produced hurricane-force winds in one state during a single season since 1886” (Wikipedia). I guess our friend didn’t remember that far back.

Hurricane Charley was the first. It whipped up fairly fast, moved through very fast, and only sideswiped us. Whew! But, soon after came Hurricane Frances. That one really scared us. The news for days and days was ominous and dire. And for good reason. This superstorm was very slow-moving, which meant that it would batter and rip and flood and destroy whatever was in its path for much longer than most hurricanes. And, according to all the models, what was in its path, was us! So, we decided to evacuate and get north to Tallahassee out of harm’s way. We crammed our SUV with our two young, special-needs sons, our four-month-old infant, and a huge golden retriever (whose storm-related neurosis made the rest of us look calm and orderly). We took what we deemed to be the most important of our possessions, and headed out as fast as we could (which wasn’t very fast since all the rest of Central Florida had come to the same decision).

We spent three horrible days on overcrowded roads, in overcrowded hotels, without power. We traveled with confused, car-sick kids (who didn’t always warn us when they were feeling sick), a cranky infant, and a 100-pound dog whose only comfort was sitting on our laps while panting profusely, even though it was 95 degrees with 100% humidity. Without power, there was no relief whatsoever from the oppressive, thick heat. Even pool water felt hotter than the air, and any ice for our lukewarm drinks was long gone. Our only light at night came from a Barbie flashlight we found in a Walmart toy section when all other flashlights had been sold

out. We were surrounded on all sides by equally uncomfortable, displaced people, many of whom were either panicked (some screaming), or who got drunk and brawled all night long.

But worst of all, we didn't actually avoid the storm. It pounded fiercely and relentlessly for days. We had no TV and radio reception was spotty. My parents in Colorado had more information on the storm than we did. From a short phone call with them on our flip phone that was almost out of power (this was before we had car chargers), we learned that the eye of the storm had finally passed over Melbourne, and was moving slowly away. We decided that unless our house was completely destroyed, home had to be better than where we were. So, we braved the torrential downpours and powerful winds to drive back, fearful of what we'd find in our hurricane-ravaged town. The storm had passed, but the area was in bad shape. The destruction we saw didn't give us much comfort for what must be waiting for us. When we got home, our street was flooded, our fence was down and some trees needed to be propped up, but the house itself looked surprisingly good. Then we tried our garage door opener. Much to our amazement it worked! We walked into the cool air conditioning and found our home just as we had left it. Even our cable TV fired right up. One neighbor who hadn't evacuated, told us our neighborhood never even lost power!

When we moved into that house, we were told that it was constructed with poured concrete walls and steel studs. Our community was built with all our power lines and cable TV underground. All in the neighborhood was made to withstand tropical storms and hurricanes. But when trouble came, we ran. And our running got us into much more trouble than if we'd stayed put and weathered the storm. We went through two more hurricanes that year, and two the following year. We rebuilt fences and propped up more downed trees. But we never evacuated again. Why? Because we had come to trust the construction built to withstand the storm. We learned that we were already in the safest place we could be.

So, what does that have to do with Psalm 91:6? As I was studying this verse, I learned that the "destruction" (or disaster, in other versions) is a Hebrew word meaning a destroying storm that devastates and sweeps people away. The imagery of this Psalm assures us that our greatest safety is under the mighty wings of God, where we cannot be swept away. In an earlier meditation, Susie pointed out that in the midst of a storm, the very safest place for a baby bird is hidden under the wings of its mother.

The powerful, trustworthy wings of God are strong and steady, able to shelter, able to keep us safe—built to withstand any storm. Those who panic and flee from under His wings, perhaps thinking that He is not trustworthy, are not moving away from the storm. The storm will rage on. They are only moving away from their place of safety, much like we did during Hurricane Frances. If you are a follower of Christ, God has you securely under His wing in the midst of this storm we now call COVID-19. It may be uncomfortable and even frightening. And you may want to run. Things may feel all wrong, and some hard things may even happen during the storm.

But be assured that no matter what destruction the storm is causing, God's got you sheltered under His wing. Now more than ever is the time to trust in the trustworthy. So, I would like to give you a challenge. Next time you hear the phrase, "shelter in place," perhaps you can hear the heart of God speaking it straight to your heart. Perhaps it can take on another meaning than a societal restriction born out of fear. Perhaps for the Christian, "sheltering in place" is choosing to stay tucked under God's wing in this storm. And, this kind of sheltering in place is not just for safety's sake, but also for the comfort and assurance we can only receive from harboring under the wing of our God -- who is the same militantly protective God speaking to us through Psalm 91.

### Prayer Focus: Sheltering in Place

Today, take some time to "shelter in place" under the wing of God. He has already provided you with safety and security there, even if you've been unaware of it. Thank Him for those things you are aware of, and for those things you are not. As you thank Him, allow Him to minister comfort and peace to your heart and mind. You are already in the safest place you can be!



## #30: The Comfort I Won't Find in Psalm 91, by Becky Sytsema

### Focus Verses: 7-8

Though a thousand fall at my side, though ten thousand are dying around me, the evil will not touch me. <sup>8</sup> I will see how the wicked are punished, but I will not share it.

### Meditation

One thing I love about Psalm 91 is that it doesn't minimize the hardships of life. It doesn't shy away from the fear we may feel, the darkness we may walk through, or even the casualties that surround us. It is full of the promises of God – not to keep us from difficulties, but to get us through our valleys victoriously. Verses 7 and 8 are perhaps the most poignant in this Psalm. They are full of death and punishment and promise – all in two verses, listed side by side. And if you are a follower of Christ looking for some comfort today, you can find it. We've talked a lot about those ways throughout these meditations.

But comfort and promise are not all that I find in Psalm 91:7-8. There is angst and sorrow for me in these verses as well. Why? Because hardships, fear, and valleys of darkness are universal. Everyone experiences them. But, the promises of God in Psalm 91 aren't universal. They aren't for everyone. And that brings an unrest and sadness to my soul.

Perhaps my sadness is greater today because of a very recent event. My son Nick is 21. But because of the severity of his disabilities, he needs adult supervision 24/7. I don't mean just having someone else in the house going about their own business. I mean someone whose attention is present with Nick, who knows where he is and what he's doing at all times, keeping his needs met, engaging him, and keeping him safe. The job doesn't pay nearly what it's worth – it's a true labor of love. Those who choose to be caregivers for people like Nick are rare gems. They are the cream of humanity, often selfless and kind, driven by compassion and love for the helpless, weak, and voiceless. In our journey with Nick, we have had the honor of knowing many such people, and we are grateful to each one of them.

But I was rocked to my core when I received a call about two weeks ago to inform me that one such beautiful young woman, one who had cared for Nick almost every Sunday and many other times over the past few years, had been found dead. Amy had committed suicide. I never saw it coming. And I haven't worked through it emotionally or spiritually. I am grieving.

Psalm 91 is part of the reason for that. Was Amy one of the ten thousand dying around me? Is she one of the wicked who will be punished? Because here's the real truth of it. Unless she was a follower of Christ, the size of her heart or selflessness of her actions won't help her eternally. By the same token, incredibly sad as it was, even how she died can't keep her from

the arms of God. The only thing that will determine her eternity is if Amy was reconciled with God through His boundless grace, poured out through the blood of Jesus. It's that simple.

And it's that sad. It's sad because I really don't know. Here is someone who spent countless hours caring for my son, and I don't know if she really knew the Lord. I can't shake that. I can't make myself more comfortable with it. But I really don't think I'm supposed to. The tension of this situation is something I pray that I never resolve and never forget. It has helped to refocus my priorities off of toilet paper and onto the truly important matters of the eternal.

While many speak of the "cost of discipleship," Dallas Willard reminded us that there is a great "cost of un-discipleship." We read about that cost here in Psalm 91:7-8. It's so very simple. There's a path to life and a path to death. There is no third way.

If you are reading this looking for comfort today, check your relationship with the Lord. If you are a follower of Christ, there is comfort for you in every book of the Bible. There are countless promises meant for you. You are safe. You are secure. COVID-19 changes absolutely nothing in the eternal landscape of your existence.

But if you are a follower of Christ, I would also challenge you this way: Do not comfort yourself in this Psalm, or any of the promises of God, to the point that you lose concern for those whose lives are not yet ensured by those promises. I hope to never do that again.

### Prayer Focus: Refocus on the Eternal

Ask the Lord to bring an eternal focus to your mind and heart today – beyond the current crisis or even its effect on the near future. While we can't completely ignore those things or our feelings surrounding them, ask God to sync your heartbeat to His, especially when it comes to the people in your life who have yet to know Him. Perhaps this crisis is the catalyst to conversations with them you may not otherwise have.

## #31: The Battlefield of My Mind, by Susie Renzema

### Focus Verses: 9-10

“If I make the Lord my refuge, if I make the Most High my shelter, no evil will conquer me; no plague will come near my home.”

### Meditation

Reading Psalm 32 this morning has me wondering something. Have I gone soft on sin and used COVID-19 to excuse myself from its truth? In an effort to be “gentle” with myself, have I taken up habits that don't really support the life I actually want? If and when things go back to normal, will I have the hard work ahead of rigorous inner housecleaning?

In my early 30s I had two heart attacks 14 months apart. Most of you know that story. I've also shared how I suffered from a prolonged season of anxiety and depression that led to a major faith crisis which ended with me pushing Jesus to the periphery of my life. I didn't want him gone. But I didn't trust him, so I didn't want him close either. Some years later, when he and I made up, I was overcome with sorrow for how I had misunderstood his care and his presence. The weight of it hung on me with a sorrow I'd never really known. He had been there all along and instead of thanking him, I was building an ugly case against him in my mind and heart. I promised myself I would never do that again, but I also doubted my ability to keep that promise.

And I haven't kept that promise. But how I push him away looks different today. Today it looks like sin, plain and simple. I might call it bad habits, or going easy on myself, or even make it as virtuous as being “relatable.” Seriously? Do I really believe active, unrepentant sin makes me relatable or relevant? Being a broken child of God makes me relatable, nothing else.

As I sift through all of this, here's what's left: why do I run to anything other than Him? I know that food, television, novels, shopping, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, a drink, a smoke, whatever! None of these ever meets my need and they never will. Only Jesus Christ will meet my need. I know how hard these habits are to break. I know how hard it is to walk out of the dark into the light, but I also know if I turn around now the walk won't take near as long.

“If I make the Lord my refuge, if I make the Most High my shelter, no evil will conquer me; no plague will come near my home.” Psalm 91:9-10

As I relate these verses to my sin, I realize that often the evil and the plague comes into my home is because I have thrown the front door wide open and welcomed them in.

Over and over I have been reminded that the battlefield is my mind. That's the frontline for those of us still sheltering in place. As this drags on, it becomes an increasingly difficult line to hold. The chronicles on social media of how people are getting through this are simultaneously hilarious and heartbreaking. Although there is nothing wrong with tackling a new recipe, or finally cleaning out your closets, if it's easier to do that than to talk to God, are we really getting ahead? Rather than coming out of this with a rockin' beach body, how about coming out with the unshakable faith of a renewed mind as in Isaiah 26:3:

“You keep him in perfect peace  
whose mind is stayed on you,  
because he trusts in you.”

The truth is this is not the last struggle you and I will ever have. Life is full of suffering and hardships and the only difference between those who make it and those who don't is where they put their hope. If my hope is in me, I'm in trouble. If it's in the Sovereign God of the universe, I'm good. But it can only really be in Him to the degree that I know Him. And I only know Him if I use my mind to deposit the truth of His Word into it daily. It's not always easy. Being convicted of the sin that still lives in me is never pleasant or comfortable, but it's always the predecessor of growth.

Yes, I want to emerge from this better, different, transformed - in my mind and in my heart - because a renewed mind, submitted to God can truly change the world.

### Prayer Focus: Our Hope in God

Ask the Lord to Help you focus your mind on those things that will help you know Him better, deposit His truth in you, and put your hope fully in Him.

## #32: An Illustration of His Indulgent Mercy and Compassion, by Becky Sytsema

### Focus Verses: 11-12

For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go.  
They will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.

### Meditation

One reason I love writing these 91 for 91 meditations is that I have had the opportunity to study this Psalm from several different perspectives. Each time we move through it, I cast my net wider to help me understand its richness. As I came to these verses on angels, this time I cast my net back over 500 years to Calvin's Commentaries. John Calvin wrote considerably more on Psalm 91:11-12 than I found in most other commentaries. And as I read through Calvin's perspective, I found myself intrigued and convicted, but also cherished and understood by God more deeply.

Here in 2020, as we are living through our current crisis, it seems that we – or at least I—have needed a great amount of God's comfort and assurance. Over and over. But in God's great patience, He provides it. Over and over. Apparently, He was doing the same in Calvin's day through Psalm 91:

"Does [God] exhibit himself to us as a fortress and shield, proffer the shadow of his protection, make himself known to us as a habitation in which we may abide, and stretch out his wings for our defense -- surely we are chargeable with the worst ingratitude if we are not satisfied with promises so abundantly full and satisfactory?"

(Boy, English has simplified!) Calvin is pointing out graphic imagery is used in this Psalm to convince us that God is trustworthy of defending and protecting us. He is accusing us (rightfully so) of being ungrateful if we need more than these promises to assure us of God's protective goodness toward us.

Calvin goes on: "If we tremble to think of his majesty, he presents himself to us under the lowly figure of the hen: if we are terrified at the power of our enemies, and the multitude of dangers by which we are beset, he reminds us of his own invincible power, which extinguishes every opposing force. When even all these attempts to encourage us have been tried, and he finds that we still linger and hesitate to approach him, or cast ourselves upon his sole and exclusive protection, he next makes mention of the angels, and proffers them as guardians of our safety. As an additional illustration of his indulgent mercy, and compassion for our weakness, he

represents those whom he has ready for our defense as being a numerous host; he...commissions the whole armies of heaven to keep watch over every individual believer.”

That paragraph is worth reading a time or two. And praying through a time or two. I think it’s worth contextualizing Calvin’s next statement to our current-day situation. Even though God makes these promises of safety and protection, many of us still find ourselves frightened by COVID-19. But it’s not just the disease that overwhelms us. It’s the long-term effects on our economy, our world, and our way forward—even how we’ll relate to each other is in some question. We wonder if this enemy will somehow be able or be allowed by God to undo us. We find ourselves needing even more assurance that God’s got this, that God’s got us, and that we will be okay once we emerge.

So, in yet a further attempt to bring perspective and comfort to us, angels are introduced into this Psalm as agents of God – mighty and powerful. But not just out there somewhere. No. They are here and now, close enough and ready to act on God’s command, so that between the time our foot stumbles, and the time that we hit the ground, they are able to buffer the fall and set us back on our feet. And not just one angel. I love Calvin’s statement that God “commissions the whole armies of heaven to keep watch over every individual believer.” Wow. One other commentary I read said that even the least, lowliest of God’s children has such a vast multitude of angels standing at the ready to protect and defend. So much so that even kings with huge armies would be jealous!

I think where it’s easy for us to have a disconnect and wonder if God really guarantees angelic protection to you and me right now, is that these angels are not at our command. So, if for some reason, we have endured a situation in which we did not feel protected, we assume that, while God may have deployed angels for the Psalmist, or in Calvin’s day, or maybe even to some degree today, God does not deploy them for us. And we try to prove it to our disbelieving souls because we got hurt somehow in a way that an angel looking out for us could have prevented.

Maybe so. But angels aren’t like us. They don’t do anything without the Lord’s command even if it brings them sorrow or grief. We know from Scripture that they have emotions, but they are never driven by them. I mean, think about it. The entire, vast hosts of heaven had to sit on their hands (or wings) employing every ounce of heavenly control not to swoop snatch up God’s beloved Son as He suffered unimaginable anguish dying on a cross. They were watching and waiting in their own anguish. But neither the Father nor the Son deployed them to execute a rescue. So, they did not rescue. If God does not command His angels, they will not move. But it doesn’t mean they are absent. Make no mistake – they are there, encamping around God’s people (Ps 34:7). They have been present and active in your life – yes, your life!

I like Calvin’s final thought on these two verses: “That we frequently stumble is owing to our own fault in departing from him who is our head and leader. And though God suffers us to stumble and fall in this manner that he may convince us how weak we are in ourselves, yet,

inasmuch as he does not permit us to be crushed or altogether overwhelmed, it is virtually even then as if he put his hand under us and bore us up.”

Simply put, often times when we stumble and fall, we did it to ourselves. Our fall is due to our own sin as we took our eyes off of God. He often lets us fall for the sake of instructing us and showing us how weak we are and how desperately we need Him. But, “He does not permit us to be crushed or altogether overwhelmed.” And to that end, God has and will continue to deploy His angels on your behalf—whether or not you are aware of it, think about it, or even really believe it.

If you are a follower of Christ, you have not and will not be crushed or altogether overwhelmed. Not by Satan, not by COVID-19, not by anything you may encounter in days to come. Will you ever be hurt? Yes. Will you stumble? Yes. Will you someday die? Yes and no. Yes, your body will cease to function in this earthly realm. Yet no, you will not pass from existence. You are an eternal being with an eternal promise. God’s angels are agents of His eternal promise. They are part of His “indulgent mercy and compassion,” in the believer’s life. Bottom line: angels are part of your present and eternal reality. How do I know? Because the beautiful, living, inerrant Word of God says so.

### Prayer Focus: Taking God at His Word

As you reread this, take it before the Lord and talk to Him about His promises and His angels: “If we tremble to think of his majesty, he presents himself to us under the lowly figure of the hen: if we are terrified at the power of our enemies, and the multitude of dangers by which we are beset, he reminds us of his own invincible power, which extinguishes every opposing force. When even all these attempts to encourage us have been tried, and he finds that we still linger and hesitate to approach him, or cast ourselves upon his sole and exclusive protection, he next makes mention of the angels, and proffers them as guardians of our safety. As an additional illustration of his indulgent mercy, and compassion for our weakness, he represents those whom he has ready for our defense as being a numerous host; he...commissions the whole armies of heaven to keep watch over every individual believer.”

## #33: God's Journal, by Susie Renzema

### Focus Verse: 13

"You will trample upon lions and cobras:  
you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet!"

### Meditation

A little over a week ago I posted the May Scripture Journaling Calendar (Our Mighty, Powerful, Sovereign God, see p. 113) and I started out by saying I was weary. We are a little over a week into May and I might add that I'm battling some lions and cobras in addition to my weariness. Is it really any wonder, though? When I set out to spend the entire month looking at the greatness and bigness of God, can I really be surprised that the enemy would come at me with full force? He hates it when we put our focus on the One who will ultimately defeat him – crush his head, more specifically.

I woke up last Monday in a good mood and ready to have a lovely day in spite of all of this craziness. But by 8am I was battling a lethal combination of self-pity and anger. I did what I know to do. I prayed about it, talked to my husband and we prayed together. It dissipated a bit, but didn't leave completely. Tuesday was better, and by Wednesday I felt like I was back to myself. But last Thursday, both were back and with the added bonus of helplessness.

I talked to a friend and, again, I just felt off. I felt needy and overwhelmed. I was trying to practice self-control, regarding the anger specifically, but it felt like it kept seeping through the cracks. When our conversation ended, I had all those self-condemning thoughts pummeling me. You know – the kind that leave you thinking surely no one in the world would ever really want to be your friend. I spent the rest of the day aimlessly moving from one thing to the next, but not actually accomplishing anything. A gloomy cloud had parked itself over me and it didn't seem to budge. But honestly, I wasn't really trying to move it either.

It was a classic case of being stuck in the doldrums. The doldrums is a sailing term that refers to a location near the equator abounding in calms, in other words, a place of no movement. Webster defines it as, a spell of listlessness or despondency; a state or period of inactivity, stagnation, or slump. Yup, that pretty much summed it up.

It would be easy to stop here and say, give yourself a pass. Take it easy. Everyone has days like this. And all of that is true. But I also think it's bigger than that. I think this is how the enemy slips in so that he can set up for the real work of taking us down. You see, for me, the lions and the cobras are not literal. They are much more stealthy than that, and frankly, more deadly. For me they are my thoughts, my feelings. They come from inside of me and therefore can be much



harder to recognize. They often roam around unattended for a while before I even know they're there. And once they have made themselves comfortable, then they start roaring! My typical reaction to the roar is to shut it up as quickly as I can. But today I was given another option by a loving friend. It's a concept that has been integral to 12 step recovery but one that I think I've largely ignored because I expect more from myself as a Christian. It's the idea of sitting with your feelings and actually feeling them rather than pushing them away or "dealing" with them. She suggested that I make a list of everything that I am missing out on because of this virus. All the fears, all the disappointments, all the canceled plans... put it all on paper and then tell my great big God how I feel about all of it. With snotty, ugly tears and expletives if that's how it happens to come out. He can take it. And when I've exhausted that, then I get on with the trampling and the crushing.

And how, exactly, do I do that? I get out my sword, the Word of God. Some days I pull it out and wield it like I'm a warrior princess, a couple of quick swipes and I'm victorious. Other days I feel like David in Saul's armor, it's too big, too heavy and I just can't seem to move in it. On those days I look at the smooth stones that I'm holding in my hand and I pray that they are enough to slay the giant. What are the smooth stones? My Bible, my journal, and my broken heart. I tell God what I'm feeling, then I search the Word for the truth to speak back to those lions, cobras, and serpents. And I keep searching until they are under my feet. In a practical sense, let me tell you that this morning it meant I prayed Psalm 10 out loud in tears. And as I did, all of the poor and oppressed and suffering filled my mind and it brought me to a place of humility and gratitude. It also assured me that my very big and powerful God is not absent or silent. And even if in the grand scheme of things my troubles are a cakewalk compared to someone else's, it doesn't mean I don't have a right to feel my feelings and tell Him about them. And of this I can be sure –He is moving on my behalf and on yours too.

I read Luke 10:18-20 in multiple translations this morning but it was The Passion Translation that really ministered to me; "Jesus replied, 'While you were ministering (the disciples had just returned from ministering and were joyfully reporting to Jesus how the evil spirits and the demons had obeyed them in His name), I watched Satan topple until he fell suddenly from heaven like lightening to the ground. Now you understand that I have imparted to you all my authority to trample over his kingdom. You will trample upon every demon before you and overcome every power Satan possesses. Absolutely nothing will be able to harm you as you walk in this authority. Heaven, your real source of joy isn't merely that these spirits submit to your authority, but that your names are written in the journals of heaven and that you belong to God's kingdom. This is the true source of your authority.'"

What was it about that passage? Not the Satan toppling, authority to trample, overcome every power, nothing will harm you parts, although those are really good. No, the part that infused my soul with hope and comfort was this, "your names (my name) are written in the journals of heaven and you belong to God's kingdom." I am an avid journaler, and the people that end up in my journal are people very dear to me. The idea that God has a journal (some translations call it a register or a list) and that my name is there. Is there really anything more important than that?

No matter what happens on this earth, my final destination is secure. Satan may win some battles, but he's already lost the war. One day Jesus will return and "He will be King over all the earth. On that day, there will be One Lord - his name alone will be worshiped." Zechariah 14:9. He alone, His Name alone will be worshiped, there will be no more competition in my heart for first place, there will be no more battles to fight from within or from without. No more disease, no more pain or sorrow, no more strife in any of my relationships, perfect unity, perfect peace, and the unending presence of the God of the Universe, all because my name is written in His book. Take that Satan!

### Prayer Focus: Our Journal

Take some time to sit with the Lord, feeling your true feeling and allow Him to minister to you. Perhaps like me, it would be helpful to journal and write it all out. Then take time to thank Him that in He has written your name in His most precious journal – not to mention the palm of His hand.

## #34: Vision Correction, by Becky Sytsema

### Focus Verses: 14

<sup>14</sup> Because he has loved Me, I will bring him out of trouble. I will set him in a safe place on high, because he has known My name. (New Life Version)

### Meditation

When I was in first grade, my teacher requested a conference with my mom to discuss an odd behavior of mine. As a rule, I was an introverted, shy kid who felt most comfortable blending into the background. The less attention focused on me the better. So, my teacher found it strange that I insisted on sitting in the front of the class. Every time the desks or tables would be rearranged, I always managed to get as close to the front as possible. In the conference my teacher floated two theories: 1. Either I was extremely fond of and somewhat oddly attached to her, or 2. I couldn't see the blackboard.

As it turns out, my eyesight was the problem. Since that time, I've worn glasses or contacts. Lasik surgery won't work for me and no other treatment is available. So, the bottom line is, I have poor vision. It is a condition I was born with, and it is a condition I must live with. Every morning when I open my eyes, the world is blurry. If at any point during the day I want to see anything further than six inches from my nose, I need to use vision correction of one kind or another. And when I do, I can see all I need to see.

Verse 14 (and 15) of Psalm 91 is, in my opinion, the heart of this Psalm. It's the summary statement of what the psalmist has been graphically describing as God's provision of rescue from dangers and trials. But when I looked at verse 14 this time around, I wasn't comforted. I was frustrated. And angry. And unsettled. And anxious. And overwhelmed. None of those feelings were aimed at God, however (and I'd be honest with you if they were). All of those feelings were aimed straight at myself.

This is our third time through this Psalm, examining it from many angles. And yet it's almost as if I was reading it for the first time. Did God really say He'd get me out of trouble? Wow. How many times does God have to answer that question for you, Becky?! That one thought stirred up my emotional waters. I was frustrated with myself because I needed this particular comfort yet again. Shouldn't this so be in my bones by now? I was angry with myself, because I had just let pressure of the current situation get to me once again. And everyone in the house knew I was out of sorts. I should be further along than this!

I was unsettled because I don't know when the current circumstances or uncertainty will change. I was anxious because I was wondering if, once the circumstances do change, will the

situation go from bad to worse? I was overwhelmed because it was all a big blur. Rereading this passage brought me comfort and made me disappointed in myself all at the same time. Then it occurred to me. I was born with poor vision! I don't get frustrated, angry, unsettled, anxious, or overwhelmed by the fact that I need glasses. I understand that glasses aren't a once-and-done kind of solution. If I want to see clearly, I put them on. That's all there is to it. And that's how it is with the Word of God. I am not deficient for needing to once again be reminded that God will bring me out of the current troubles I face. I am not lacking or faithless for needing to draw fresh comfort from a familiar passage. I needed this passage to see clearly once again – to bring, focus and perspective.

Like needing glasses, if I want to see more than six inches away from my own situation, I need the lens of God's Word, which He has made available to me—as much as I need and as often as I need. And, like using glasses, it's up to me to pick up my Bible and use it. It does no good as a table decoration or one of the fifty ignored apps on my phone.

But, unlike glasses that are replaced as my needs change, the Word of God never changes. In fact, it changes me. It is living and powerful (Heb. 4:12). The words are ancient, but the revelations are always fresh and beautiful. And the God it reveals is infinitely patient with me, much more so than I am with myself. He invites me back time and time again to be refreshed, renewed and reminded.

And so today He invites me back to look once again through the lens of His promise. He invites me to take my focus off of this world's many troubles, and refocus on His goodness, His love, His mercy, His grace. He invites me to dare to believe that He can be trusted to bring me out of these troubles and set me in a safe place. And today, He invites you to do the same.

### Prayer Focus: Focusing

Sharpen your vision today. Spend some time in His word and in prayer. Reread the passages that the Lord has used to bring you growth and comfort and focus in the past. Spend some time intentionally refocusing your mind and your heart on the God of your salvation.

## #35: The Real Battle, Part One, by Susie Renzema

### Focus Verses: 1-4

Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This I declare about the LORD:

He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him.

For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease.

He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings.

His faithful promises are your armor and protection.

### Meditation

The enemy, Satan, has one main goal that is his life's work – to separate you from God. He began this work before you ever took your first breath and he will continue until the day you take your last. He actually began the whole thing all the way back in the Garden with the first man and woman. You will never be free of this relentless pursuit until you stand face to face with Jesus Christ. That's not conjecture. That's a fact.

The good news, though, the very good news, is that if your life is hidden in Christ, Satan is an already-defeated foe. But as long as I am living here, on this fallen earth that is not yet my eternal home, I am going to have to do battle. But here's the thing. You can't hope to win a battle if you don't even realize you're in a war, or if you're fighting on the wrong field. Right now, we think we're fighting a virus or a decimated economy or even other people, but that's not it at all. No. We're actually battling doubt in the goodness of God.

Many of the Psalms were written in the context of battle and during times of war. I think this is why so many people love the Psalms. Even though we don't live in daily battles in a literal sense, spiritually we definitely do. If you look at your life backwards, all of you could relate times of struggle, trial, fear and doubt. These may not have involved threats to your physical existence, but they were still real battles. And each one was designed by a crafty and persistent enemy to threaten your spiritual existence. Each and every battle you face has one and only one desired outcome—to get you to doubt God and turn from Him.

Please hear me, I am in no way suggesting that you can lose your salvation by doubting. Nothing could be further from the truth. Romans 8:38 says,

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

Nothing, nothing, nothing. But what I do know, what I have lived through, is the cold and lonely place that doubting His goodness leaves you.

The story of God and His people is a story of inclusion. Look at the phrases used to describe His people: sheep in a sheepfold, children in a family, a bride and a bridegroom, fish in a net, a holy nation, sand on the seashore, the inhabitants of God's house, the different parts of a body. All of these illustrate the inclusion of those who are in Christ and the exclusion of those who are not. But in my experience, there is another place, a place in-between, so to speak. Not literally but figuratively.

I have yet to meet another person who doesn't hate the feeling of being left out. We innately believe that there must be something wrong with us if someone rejects us in any way. God never rejects His own, but the enemy likes to convince us that we've somehow been overlooked or forgotten. And once Satan plants that seed of doubt, although I may still believe in God's goodness for everyone else, I'm not sure about it for myself. I feel like I'm outside the boundaries of His care. It's like I'm next to the sheepfold but not inside.

Psalms 91:1-4 lays out a list of words that are intended to bring us comfort – words like shelter, rest, refuge, rescue, protect, cover. All of this is promised to us as we take cover under God's feathers. He is calling us under His wings to keep us safe and secure from the lies and schemes of the enemy. But when you don't trust the protector, when you doubt the goodness of the One offering the shelter, you don't run there. That's the aim of doubt – to keep you from running to the only One who can actually help you. To keep you distanced from the One who loves you perfectly. That leaves you out in the storm to be battered by the elements. And that's exactly where Satan wants you!

But God has not, and will not ever, leave you on your own to fight. The last line of verse 4 is a beautiful display of His love and care for us:

“His faithful promises are your armor and protection.”

We have promises that He will never leave us all throughout His Word. And we have armor to protect us as we fight the enemy. Come back on Wednesday for part two of this meditation, because we're going to go through the six pieces of armor we've been given. And I'd like to add a seventh piece you may not have thought of. The armor of God contains everything necessary to squelch the doubt that excludes you from hiding under His wings.

### Prayer Focus: The Real Battle

You can't hope to win a battle if you don't even realize you're in a war, or if you're fighting on the wrong field. Ask the Lord to show you the true battlefield – where the enemy attacks your mind and heart with doubt and fear, meant to separate you from God and His love. Spend time today connecting with the God who has provided you all you need to defeat your enemy.

## #36: The Real Battle, Part Two, (The Armor of God) by Susie Renzema

### Focus Verses: 1-4

Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This I declare about the LORD:

He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him.

For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease.

He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings.

His faithful promises are your armor and protection.

### Meditation:

My father grew up without a father for most of his life. But in his late forties God brought him a spiritual father that had a profound effect on him and in turn, had a profound effect on my entire family. Dr. Victor Matthews was the epitome of what you'd expect in a Baptist preacher and seminary professor. He was quiet, studious, always wore a pressed shirt and usually a tie. He had the kindest eyes of nearly anyone I've ever known, and I realized today it was because he was literally a beacon of the love of Christ. But when that man prayed, watch out! He moved in the kind of authority I had never seen before. He knew the Word, he knew his God, and he knew the plans and schemes of the enemy. It was from him that I learned about spiritual warfare, first of all that it even existed and second, how to stand firm in battle. He had a four-page prayer that he gave everyone in his Sunday school class called The Warfare Prayer. It was literally four pages of Scripture knit together to pray against attacks from the enemy. And within this prayer were the verses from Ephesians 6, The Whole Armor of God. For most of my adult Christian life I have daily prayed on the armor, usually on my knees first thing in the morning, but often familiarity leads to complacency. When that happens, I need to slow down and take a longer look so I can fully appreciate the provision and protection I have in these all too familiar pieces.

Many of you are also familiar with the Armor of God. And if you have those verses memorized, hang on because I'm going to shake up the order a bit. If not, here is Ephesians 6:13-17;

"Therefor put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the breastplate of God's righteousness. For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

I always start from the top and work my way down. First, I put on the helmet of Salvation. I always start here because the battlefield is my mind, I have to get “on the field” before I can engage in the battle. This is where I correct wrong thinking, this is what it means to “take every thought captive.” I submit every thought to the truth of my salvation. To put on the helmet of Salvation, let me ask you this: When was the last time you stopped and meditated? I deliberately chose that word because meditate means “to focus one’s thoughts on.” So, when was the last time you focused your thoughts on your salvation? Have you ever taken the time to sit and reminisce on what the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit did in order to save you? Think of all the circumstances, the people, the timing, the LOVE that all converged to bring you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. I dare say that single exercise could do more to defeat your doubt than anything else! Tell yourself your own story and see how much strength and comfort it brings.

Next I put on the breastplate of Righteousness. If the helmet of Salvation covers my wayward thoughts, the breastplate of Righteousness does the same for my wayward emotions. What I think about God determines how I feel about Him, so both of these are vitally important. The doctrine of Righteousness is one of those elements of my faith that I just cannot get over. It can still bring me to tears to think that the perfect Righteousness of Christ was imputed to me at salvation and because of that, I have unlimited access to God the Father. Because of the Righteousness of Christ, when God the Father looks at me, He doesn’t see all of my sin (past, present, OR future). He only sees the perfect Righteousness of His Son. I stand before a Holy and just God with a clean slate! So, when the enemy wants to condemn me with feelings of shame, guilt, insufficiency, weakness, and doubt, I remind him of my perfect record. I look at the perfection of Christ and remember that that perfection is mine too.

The third piece of the armor is the belt of Truth. In praying on this piece I often say to God; “when my thoughts and feeling lie to me, correct them with your belt of Truth.” In a previous meditation I said I sometimes feel like David in Saul’s armor, it’s too big, too heavy, and I can’t move in it. That’s because I wasn’t meant to wear someone else’s armor, I am meant to wear my own. My story, my history with God is fitted specifically to me and where I see this is in the fitting of the belt of truth. The truth of God’s Word is absolute but the way it “fits” me today is vastly different from 20, 30, or 40 plus years ago when I first became a follower of Christ. Where I see this manifest most is in the conviction of sin. The longer I follow Christ, the more I see the truth of my sinful nature. Things that didn’t even look like sin when I first became a Christian are glaring indictments today. And because I won’t be free of sin until I reach my eternal home, I need to continue to daily put on the belt of Truth. The enemy loves to get us to compromise but the truth of God’s Word is the best antidote to that.

Next are the sandals of the Gospel of Peace. Our warfare “is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). However, the enemy loves to stir up strife between flesh and blood believers and watch with delight as we ignore the real work of the gospel while we fight among ourselves. I ask daily to walk in peace among my



brothers and sisters in Christ. In a practical sense this means being quick to admit when we are wrong and quick to forgive. It also means I readily invite God to “search my heart and see if there be any wicked way in me.” (Psalm 51)

Now that I’m clothed, so to speak, I pick up the shield of Faith. The shield of Faith is what I hold up to deflect the flaming arrows of the enemy. These arrows can be anything from garden variety temptation to sin all the way to flat out persecution from fellow believers. Faith deflects the darts meant to lodge in my heart and cause me to doubt the goodness of God that we talked about on Monday.

A number of years ago I did a study on Ephesians and I learned something about the Roman shields that soldiers used in battle. I think it’s very applicable to our spiritual battles against the enemy today. The Roman shields were made to be interlocking. When soldiers were out on the battlefield, they would form a line and lock their shields together forming a wall of armor, more or less. They would also do this in a circle formation creating a shield on all sides. They knew they were safer together than apart. And so are we. When we lock our faith with that of our brothers and sisters, we are stronger and safer. I think this is also a beautiful picture of intercession. As I pray in faith for you and your struggles, I help you form a wall of defense against the enemy.

Lastly, we take in our hands the only offensive weapon in the entire armor, the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God! I could write and write and write on this one. Every other piece of your armor is weakened if you don’t know how to use your sword. At best you can hunker down and try to hold your own without it, but properly utilized you can actually use it to take back stolen ground. There is absolutely no substitute for the Word of God. In spiritual warfare, a casual acquaintance with the Word is like showing up to a real battle with a plastic sword. Think of your Bible as the armory. It’s where the motherlode is stored. Just like soldiers train and practice in peace time so they are ready when war comes, we train by soaking in the Word even when there is no imminent threat. I think of it like a savings account. You keep putting the money in not knowing when you’ll need it, but you want to make sure it’s there just in case. Daily time in the Word is making deposits for the inevitable rainy day.

This is how we stand against the enemy. This is how we defend ourselves against all the plans and schemes aimed at planting doubt in our souls. This is how we answer that sly serpent when he starts questioning us about the goodness of God. But we’re still not to that seventh piece, that one thing that I absolutely cannot do battle without. That’s what we’ll examine on Friday, and I promise it will be worth the wait!

### Prayer Focus: The Armor of God

Today let’s take time to look at each piece of armor described in this meditation. Take some time with the Lord—not just to run through a rote prayer, but intentionally meditating on the great importance and need for each of these pieces as we apply them.

## #37: The Real Battle, Part Three, (Battling with Music) by Susie Renzema

### Focus Verses: 1-4

Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This I declare about the LORD:

He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him.

For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease.

He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings.

His faithful promises are your armor and protection.

### Meditation:

“My soul, I’ve found, has puppet strings  
to make me droop or give me wings.  
And music is the puppeteer  
that turns my ear to hear.”

— Richelle E. Goodrich, *Slaying Dragons*

Isn’t this what a spiritual battle can feel like? The lack of control over my circumstances makes me feel like a puppet and although I know who ultimately controls the strings, there have been so many times it feels like Satan has them. I had a marionette when I was a kid and all I remember was that her strings were so tangled from misuse that she couldn’t do what she was made to do. She hung on my closet doorknob in a contorted mess until I eventually threw her away.

I think this is a pretty apt picture of what the enemy wants to do with us. He wants to knock us around to the point that we’re so tangled up in our thoughts and feelings and circumstances that we hang lifeless no longer doing what we were created to do. He does this by planting doubt in our minds as to the goodness of God, he wants to make your “soul droop” in discouragement and fear. But we have armor to suit up in and weapons to wield in this battle, this battle that takes place in our minds.

When I started this series of meditations over a week ago, this way of battle that I’ve saved for today is actually the first one I gave thought to. Sometimes even though I’m all decked out in my armor, my heart still feels faint and my mind is still unstable. This is when I need that last “piece” so to speak. This is when I need MUSIC! And as I was thinking about this, I realized that music wasn’t just a bonus resource in battle, but a necessity. The army has a band. Music has been a part of the battlefield as long as men have been fighting each other. But why, what is the actual purpose of music in battle?

“Military bands evolved from buglers and drummers who led troops into battle and served to communicate commands over the noise on the battlefield. Drummers also aided marching troops with their cadence. Today military bands are largely ceremonial. Their duties include change of command ceremonies, parades, and public event appearances such as athletic contests. They are a morale and public relations asset.”

Music “communicates commands over the noise on the battlefield.” I don’t know about you, but when I’m in a full blown spiritual battle the noise in my head can be deafening! When I’m in a battle and it feels like Satan is winning, I cannot hear the truth. I might be reading the Word and praying, but it’s like it just won’t stick. But, so often during these times I will get a song “stuck” in my head. If I slow down and listen to what’s actually playing, it’s often just what I need to hear.

Music is powerful, specifically music that praises and worships God. The devil hates to hear us praise God. “The devil, the originator of sorrowful anxieties and restless troubles, flees before the sound of music almost as much as before the Word of God....Music is a gift and grace of God, not an invention of men. Thus it drives out the devil and makes people cheerful. Then one forgets all wrath, impurity, and other devices.”— Martin Luther

The devil “flees...before the sound of music almost as much as before the Word of God...” considering this, think of the power of music that’s based on the Word of God? When we fill our minds with music that is based on Scripture or Scriptural truths we are adding to that savings account I mentioned on Wednesday. For me, music is how I most often make a withdrawal from that account. Like I said, so often the song that’s stuck in my head is actually the Word of God, and when I sing it I am wielding my sword at the enemy. I am telling myself the truth, the powerful truth of who my God is and what I mean to Him. Satan hates to be reminded that he’s a defeated foe. When you have a praise chorus stuck in your head, it’s like you’re following him around and repeatedly saying, “you’re gonna lose, you’re gonna lose!”

And finally, “Only in the act of praise and worship can a person learn to believe in the goodness and greatness of God.” C.S. Lewis

The battle of my life, and of yours, is to believe without a doubt that God is good and that He loves us and will only do that which is good for us eternally. And because of His greatness we can live in confidence that this will come to pass. Fix your mind on God’s goodness and greatness today. Wield your sword in song and watch the enemy flee!

### Prayer Focus: Music

Pray in song today. Fix your mind on God’s goodness and greatness with music.

## #38: What Are You Afraid Of? (Part One), by Jack Sytsema

### Focus Verse: 5

You will not fear the terror of night,  
nor the arrow that flies by day,

### Meditation:

Fear is a thief. It's an often debilitating and consuming state of mind that robs us of peace, joy, and our abundant life. The Bible has a lot to say about fear and our ongoing struggle with it. That's probably why the phrase "fear not" is used 365 times.

Recently I got to wondering, when was fear first mentioned in the Bible? When was it first introduced into the world? That took me back to Genesis 3. We all know the context of this passage: Adam and Eve had just disobeyed God. As a result, "When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees. Then the LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?' He replied, 'I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.'" (vv.8-10)

It's interesting that the first time fear is mentioned has to do with being afraid of God; not fear of some evil or terrifying enemy. Adam and Eve were afraid of God! They had been naked their entire lives. In fact, a few verses earlier the Bible describes Adam and Eve as naked and not ashamed. But now, they were naked and experiencing fear.

What changed? The obvious answer is sin. But there's more to it than that. As a byproduct of sin, their perception of God and His love for them changed so much that their relationship with Him went from complete intimacy to hiding and desperate avoidance.

Fear is defined as an intense, unpleasant emotion caused by the belief that someone or something is dangerous, likely to cause pain, or a threat. That's how Adam and Eve began to perceive God – as angry and out to punish.

But isn't that how many Christians perceive God? Despite countless illustrations of His love, kindness, mercy, grace and sacrifices made to restore intimate relationship with Him, too often God is seen as an absent Father who is detached and unconcerned with our circumstances or pain; who watches people in distress and offers no assistance. Unless we sin. Then He'll step in quickly with angry punishment and harsh correction.

How does that happen? How do people develop such a negative view of God?

No doubt there are many reasons. But I think one major reason is because we can feel very much like Adam and Eve – exposed and vulnerable to the point that we run and hide. It’s in that posture of hiding that the enemy can truly begin to distort our view of God. We can become convinced that God is gunning for us, or that our relationship with Him is beyond repair, at least here on earth. It is in the hiding – when we run, cover ourselves, and create distance between ourselves and God – where we can so easily develop a fear and dread of God and His intentions.

And it is in the hiding that we often experience true “terror in the night.” How often does fear rob us of peaceful sleep as we scheme to fix our sinful mistakes, or wonder when “the other shoe will drop?” How often do we lie awake in shame feeling exposed and vulnerable? How often do we wrestle with a relentless temptation in the night, white-knuckling it until morning finally allows us to busy ourselves just enough to get some relief (hoping we don’t get hit with an arrow that flies by day).

If we live trying to hide our sin, our temptations, or our ugliness – trying to hide our true selves from God, why is it that we are so quick to wonder where He is when we come into challenging times? Could it be that we, not God, are the ones in hiding? I have learned over many years that if I am feeling that God is distant or unconcerned or mad at me, I need to get curious. I need to start to wonder, what I am trying to hide from God? What is creating fear in me that makes me want to hide from Him instead of running toward Him?

Are you feeling that God is distant from you in these challenging days? Do you wonder if He is uninterested, or if He has a plan of rescue for you while you are here on earth? Do you experience separation from Him? Are you afraid of Him? Then I’d like to challenge you to take the next few days to get curious and prayerfully consider why that may be. In the next meditation, I’d like to explore some biblical remedies to coming out of hiding so you can live in peaceful intimacy with the God who loves you with a depth of affection and commitment that we struggle to fully understand on this side of heaven.

### Prayer Focus: Getting Curious

Take the next few days to get curious and prayerfully consider if there is any part of you that you are trying to hide from God. We will take more time throughout this week to explore how to begin to come out of hiding and restore intimacy with Him.

## #39: What Are You Afraid Of? (Part Two), by Jack Sytsema

### Focus Verses: 5-6

You will not fear the terror of night,  
nor the arrow that flies by day,  
nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,  
nor the plague that destroys at midday.

### Meditation:

Fear is a thief. Okay, so I started out my last meditation with the same sentence. But it's worth repeating. I find it interesting that verses 5-6 of don't talk about removing the actual threats of terrors (dangers) or arrows or pestilence or even plagues from our lives. This verse is talking about freedom from the fear of those things. Isn't that a bit strange? It seems that dangers and arrows and pestilence and plagues are worse than fear. I mean there's a reason we're afraid of them, right? But I have to wonder if the psalmist focuses on fear because, while these other threats may be able to change our circumstances, fear is the only one of these things that can change our view of God.

*When fear is ruling our hearts, our faith is affected.* It can become difficult to believe that God is at working for our good – or wonder if He's working at all. Fear can cause us to view our difficulties as a punishment, or maybe even a curse from God. We easily begin to doubt God's goodness or wonder if He even cares.

*When fear is ruling our minds, our behavior is affected.* I don't believe that fear in and of itself is a sin. It's a God-given emotion that can serve us well when it keeps us from running across a busy freeway or petting a rattling snake. But when fear of our circumstances or the future or even fear of God overtakes our thinking (like it did with Adam and Eve in [Genesis 3:10](#)), we may want to distance ourselves from God as we question His character, intentions, dependability, or even His love for us.

But when we run or hide from God, we are moving away from the benefits we have studying here in Psalm 91. When we run, we are not dwelling in His shelter, resting in His shadow, or making Him our fortress. Verse 9 says, "If you say, 'The LORD is my refuge,' and you make the Most High your dwelling, ..." (NIV). That means we have some responsibility when it comes to passages such as Psalm 91. But the good news is, we have help!

Verse 5 definitively says, "You will not fear." It's a statement of fact. Yet that's not something we are capable of on our own. We need a strength and a power beyond ourselves to give us that kind of victory over fear. But we need to do our part: stop running, come out of hiding,

and submit ourselves to God. When we do those things, the power of the Holy Spirit can then do the heavy lifting and bring us out from fear.

It's the same sort of thing we see in Romans 12:2, which says, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." I love this verse because of what it does and doesn't say. It doesn't say "transform yourself and renew your mind." It says, "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." There's a big difference! The real work of transformation is done by the Holy Spirit—not by us. We just need to come out of hiding and show up!

Through the Holy Spirit, we have access to fearless, transformative power. So, what goes wrong? Why do we have fear and doubt, or feel as though we've not been transformed? For that, I go back once again to the first time fear was introduced in the Bible. Genesis 3:10, "[Speaking to God, Adam] replied, 'I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.'"

In the [last meditation](#) I talked about Adam's fear of God. He felt naked and vulnerable. He ran. He hid. But, we can't get around the fact that Adam's behavior was the result of sin. The same is still true today. Sin is at the bottom of fear. Sin is at the bottom of doubt. Sin is at the bottom of our distorted views of God and His goodness toward us. It may not always be our own sin – it may be the result of someone else's sin against us. But it is sin nonetheless.

Again, fear is not sinful. But when we are fearful, we can't let it drive us away from God. We won't find the safety or comfort we long for by running from our strong fortress.

In the next part of this meditation, we'll look at how we position ourselves to "be transformed." We'll also look at why holiness (notice, I didn't say perfection!) is an exciting path to identity, peace, and living free of fear from dangers, arrows, pestilence, and plagues (yes, that includes COVID-19).

### Prayer Focus: Starting the Conversation

Spend some time today sitting with the Lord and meditating on the phrase "You will not fear." If you've not yet or not recently talked with God about your fears, today may be a good day to run toward your Strong Tower by starting that conversation with Him.

## #40: What Are You Afraid Of? (Part Three), by Jack Sytsema

### Focus Verses: 5-6

You will not fear the terror of night,  
nor the arrow that flies by day,  
nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,  
nor the plague that destroys at midday.

### Meditation:

Psalm 91 is a great psalm of protection and hope in the face of danger. That is why 91 for 91 was launched as the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic began to take hold. In days of uncertainty and fear, we look to God for comfort, security and safety that can only be found in Him. This psalm certainly checks all those boxes.

Here in verse five is a phrase that I take particular comfort in: “You will not fear.” In the last meditation, we looked at that phrase as a strong statement of fact, even though it is not something we can do on our own. Only the Holy Spirit within us can produce fearless faith that does not flinch at danger, arrows, disease or plagues. But there is a catch. We need to show up! Just as we need the Holy Spirit to produce fearless faith, the Holy Spirit needs our cooperation to complete the work within us. Psalm 91 is clear about that.

This passage starts out by saying, “Whoever dwells in the shadow of the most high.” In verse 9, it reiterates, “If you say, ‘The Lord is my refuge,’ and you make the Most High your dwelling...” Verses 14-15 add an exclamation point: “‘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;’”

When we look at our responsibility in living under the protection of God, it becomes very clear that the real enemy to our security is not the dangers or plagues or death that we may fear. The real enemy is separation from God! Sin is what first brought separation from God in Genesis 3, and sin remains the great separator today. As Christ-followers, we have been forgiven. Our sins have been wiped clean and our eternity in unity with God is secure. But, as we saw in parts 1 and 2 of this meditation, ongoing sin can result in us running and hiding from God while we live on earth. Unrepentance costs us a great deal in this life.

I love how C.S. Lewis puts it: “[God] cannot bless us unless He has us. When we try to keep within us an area that is our own, we try to keep an area of death. Therefore, in love, He claims all. There’s no bargaining with Him.”



God does not call us to live a holy life because He wants to ruin things for us. It's because He wants to bless us! But if you talk about living in holiness from the pulpit, you get a lot of blank stares. I think that's because we tend to think holiness and perfection are synonymous. And on this side of heaven, perfection is simply not attainable. Therefore, we assume that holiness is not attainable.

But living a holy life does not mean you become perfect, free from sin, struggles, temptations or wrong desires. And holiness is not just about denying your wrong desires and temptations. Instead, holiness is all about surrendering your whole life to Christ. Not just the sinful parts either. Holiness is also about bringing your hopes, your dreams, your brokenness, your desires, your humanness – all of it – under the lordship of Christ. Holiness is about total submission to God's will.

Does that sound even harder to do? Here is a quick exercise I want to challenge you with. Reread the paragraph above. Go ahead and do that now.

Honestly, what was the first thought or emotion you had? Was your first thought one of excitement and anticipation? Was it more dread and wondering if God will take such control that you will no longer be you? Or was it something completely different? Whatever you truly thought or felt can reveal a lot about how really trustworthy God seems to you.

But here is a thought I'd like to leave you with. Holiness is not some impossible task God tells us to try and achieve. Holiness is about becoming the person that we were meant to be. Holiness is the ultimate discovery of our true selves. How can that be? Simple. We are created in the image of God. Since holiness is part of His image, holiness is part of our identity. To be holy – to truly submit to God – is to discover our identity.

Along with living in the security of fearless faith described in Psalm 91, God has promised abundant, satisfying life to those who are truly willing to submit to Him. But, do we think that God is really able to satisfy us? Think back to a time you were awe-struck by a beautiful sunset or by hearing thundering ocean waves or by smelling the fresh spring air, or by witnessing the birth of your child, or some other wonder that completely swept you away. In that perfect moment, caught up in the beauty of what only God can create, we are perfectly and deeply satisfied *without a single thought of ourselves*. If a single, momentary glimpse of God's glorious handiwork can bring such satisfaction to the depth of our souls, imagine what actually being in His presence is like! In the end, nothing will satisfy what we really hunger for other than God and living in what He has prepared for us.

If we look to God for the comfort and security described in Psalm 91, we need to be willing to look to Him for everything else that concerns us. That is living in holiness. That is truly positioning ourselves to dwell in the shadow of the Most High, and the protected, abundant, satisfying life that resides there.

## Prayer Focus: Wrestling Through

As you ponder this meditation, what jumps out at you? Living in fearlessness? The possibility of living in holiness? God's trustworthiness with your identity? Believing that God can truly satisfy? Take some time to sit with God today and wrestle through what challenges you.

## #41: *Imago Dei*, by Susie Renzema

### Meditation:

This last week was hard. The video that we've all watched by now and the ensuing riots and destruction of property have added to the ongoing grief and confusion of an already splintered nation. Not to mention the fact that we're still living with the COVID-19 virus and many of the restrictions that we all thought would be long gone by now. I cried after watching church yesterday because, honestly, I don't know why. It just feels overwhelming and I miss my people.

Last Friday I asked for topic suggestions for our Scripture journal plan for this month and the first suggestion I received was on racism. I wasn't averse to the idea but I also didn't want to be another person throwing around my opinions without any real understanding. Within a few hours of the suggestion a Latin phrase popped into my head, *Imago Dei*, this was to be the centerpiece of the plan. *Imago Dei* is Latin for "image of God" and in Christianity it means "that despite the image of God being partially lost (because of the fall) each person fundamentally has value regardless of class, race, gender, or disability." (Wikipedia)

The heart of any racial breakdown, to me, is that we stop seeing the "other" as created in the Image of God. Once someone is no longer an image bearer in my eyes, I am open to justifying all kinds of thoughts and behaviors that are grossly unbiblical. And the other person's behavior has nothing to do with this. Behavior may mar the image but it can never change its essence.

I am the daughter of Lin and Bobbi Snider and I share a combination of their physical features and personality traits and no amount of bad behavior will change that. Likewise, as a child of God, I can live in deliberate sin and rebellion against my creator, but the purpose for which I was created - to bring glory to God - will never change. I was made to reflect His glory and as long as I draw breath on this earth there remains the hope of my doing just that, regardless of how sinfully I am living.

Look at the thief on the cross, with his final breath he reflected the glory of God when he asked Jesus to remember him in paradise. And what of the thief who didn't repent and used his final breath to curse Christ? He was still created in the Image of God but an unrepentant heart kept him from knowing the joy of salvation. He didn't stop being an image bearer just because he refused to do what he was created to do.

The truth is we all mar the Image of God every day, even those of us who are Christ followers. "And we all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." 2 Corinthians 3:18. The phrase "from one degree of glory to another" tells me that this glory reflecting is a process and it happens over a lifetime, it's called sanctification.

## Prayer Focus: Scripture Journaling

This is more of a journaling challenge. The verses I have chosen for this month are based on 10 attributes of God that we, as Christians, share with Him. Although we will never share in them to the same degree as He because we are not perfect, we were still created to display these attributes to the world. The 10 ten attributes I have chosen are from Jen Wilkin's book, *"In His Image, 10 Ways God Calls Us to Reflect His Character"* the verse references are mine.

As you journal these verses, ask yourself how you might actively seek to see the Image of God in those you encounter daily. And how can you be that reflection as well. For those of you with young children, I would really encourage you to read these verses aloud with them and discuss how they also can seek out God's Image in their friends and classmates, whoever they come into contact with.

**For the full Scripture Journal Plan, see p. 115**

## #42: Are We Right or Are We Effective?, by Becky Sytsema

### Focus Verses: 7-8

Though a thousand fall at your side,  
though ten thousand are dying around you,  
these evils will not touch you.  
Just open your eyes,  
and see how the wicked are punished.

### Meditation:

Okay, confession time. I've grown weary. Really weary. In fact, yesterday I actually found myself longing for simpler days. And how was I defining "simpler days?" As those golden days of early spring when I was assessing my toilet paper supply, readying the table for an actual family meal or checking YouTube for the latest facemask pattern. Days before our son was so sick that Jack and I had to discuss a DNR, or before his beautiful 27-year-old caregiver committed suicide, or before Nick and Sam both had seizures in the same week. Days before the true challenges of pastoring a socially-distanced church, or navigating remote learning for our kids, or dealing with prolonged isolation truly set in. Days before I had to care that Zoom existed. I know most of you reading this have been through a great deal as well in these past few months and have plenty of your own stories to tell.

But the events of my recent story aren't at the heart of my weariness. That honor belongs to the bickering – the political ranting, wildly contradictory news reports, and agendas so consuming that common sense is completely ignored. That honor belongs to people hitting the "share" button based on a headline -- before actually absorbing (or possibly even reading) the hatefulness they just shared. And now the shameful reality of our nation's racial divide is, very rightly, at the center of our attention, even displacing COVID-19 as the top news story. The anger and blaming and hatred it has stirred up even among believers is very sobering.

I looked at these verses in Psalm 91 again and (perhaps for the first time in my own lifetime), I could actually conceive of 1,000 falling at my side, and ten thousand dying around me – whether it be through deadly viruses, angry violence, or a relentless despair leading to disastrous outcomes. My dear friends, these tricky and difficult days are the exact time when we, as Christ-followers must press into our true purpose, our true destiny, which is being representatives of our God on this earth – representatives of His love, His mercy, His grace, His forgiveness, His tenderness, His patience, His kindness, His self-control – representatives of His story and testimony of how it has intersected with our own.

It's important for us to remember that Jesus lived with many similar circumstances. He lived in a day of great political unrest when most thought that His messianic purpose was to bring

order to government, rather than salvation from sin and reconciliation to God. In Jesus' day, prejudice and deadly oppression of races, classes and genders were running rampant for the Jews living in a male-dominated, Roman-controlled society. Two-thousand years ago, what we now consider to be minor illnesses were much deadlier and life expectancies much shorter. People were ostracized and isolated for medical reasons all the time—and often for life.

Jesus faced all of what we do today, and He did it without the convenience (or detriment) of the internet! But in the middle of it all, His example to us is clearly one of love and respect toward all. His commission to us was not to sway politics in our favor, or push our opinions no matter whom we offend or dehumanize in the process. His commission to us was to represent Him – to make disciples of all nations and baptizing them in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19-20). That is our commission. That is our purpose. That is our destiny.

So, with that in mind, here is the question burning in my heart. In these very tricky days, it more important to be right, or is it more important to be effective? Is it more important to be sure our opinion is heard, or to humbly and effectively represent our Lord and savior so as to fulfill our part of the Great Commission? What was more important to Jesus? What did He display in the face of political oppression, discrimination, social unrest, and medical crises?

I'm not saying we shouldn't have opinions or passions. Of course, we should. I have plenty of strong political, social, and medical stances that may differ from yours. My theological view of God or interpretation of Scripture may even differ from yours to some degree. But I pray that those things would never, ever keep me from representing Christ to a lost and dying world.

In preparing to write this article, I was talking to my good friend, Sue Decker. She showed me a very interesting paper she had typed up, printed and framed years ago. It was 1 Corinthians 13 – the chapter on love. She broke the verse down with the following headings: “Do I want to be right?” (after which she paraphrased verses 1-3) or “Do I want to be loving?” (after which she paraphrased verses much of the rest of the chapter). Most are very familiar with the latter:

“Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not boast, it is not proud. Love does not dishonor others. It is not self-seeking. Love is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices in the truth. Love always protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres. Love never fails!” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

But I loved how she paraphrased the first three verses under the heading “Do I want to be right?”. It said, “If I speak, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have all knowledge, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I have mountain moving faith, but do not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”

In other words, we can be absolutely right, understand more than anyone else, display great faith, and be extremely generous. But if we do not have love (even for “those” liberals—or

“those” conservatives, or “those” gays, or “those” politicians, or “those” felons, or “those” homeless, or “those” fill-in-the-blank), we have fallen short of our commission. We have lost sight of our true purpose as Christ-followers.

Sue ended her framed page with Luke 10:27, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind. Love your neighbor as yourself.”

So, what is really more important to you? Being right or being effective? I completely admit that I have days when my human ugliness rises up and that I’d rather be right. But that’s exactly when I know in my heart of hearts that I am flat out wrong. That’s when I need to throw myself at the mercy of God’s grace, and then in receiving it, resolve to show grace to others – especially in these days when grace has so frequently been forgotten in the quest to be right.

### Prayer Focus: Extensions of Grace

I challenge us all to prayerfully consider if there is any part of our lives in which our drive to prove ourselves right is more important to us than it is to represent God’s grace and mercy. If there is such an area in your life, you may want to get curious as to why that is and bring it before the Lord. If you do, you are likely to see something beautiful happen, because it’s at times like that when we get to see God extend His grace to us long before He asks us to extend it to others.

## #43: *Coram Deo*, by Susie Renzema

### Focus Verses: 9-10

If you make the LORD your refuge,  
if you make the Most High your shelter,  
no evil will conquer you;  
no plague will come near your home.

### Meditation:

Admittedly I'm getting a little bit tired of Psalm 91, not in and of itself, but in continuing to wrestle new meaning out of a beloved and much studied passage. Yet I'm also extremely grateful for the opportunity to do this writing and for the faithfulness of God to continue to give me insights to share. And as I read it through again this week, I was particularly impressed with the level of intimacy between the psalmist and God. To be able to declare all that he does in verses 1-13 implies that he has walked very closely with his Creator. To be able to say how another will act and react in a given situation is to know them intimately. After almost 28 years of marriage I know what will upset Ron, I know what he'll get excited about, I know how he will listen and encourage, and he knows the same about me. This kind of intimacy has nothing to do with sex and everything to do with emotional vulnerability. When someone has seen you at your best and worst moments over a period of many years, it's this level of intimacy that's forged. In marriage it is an incredible gift, with God the Father it is even better.

One reason so many people love the Psalms, people in and out of the Church, is because they are so emotionally raw. The psalmists are never afraid to say exactly what they are feeling. Whether they are pouring out their hearts in unadulterated praise, or calling for their enemies "years to be few and for all of their offspring to die" (Psalm 109:8 and 13). I think part of the reason for this total transparency is found in another Latin phrase, *coram Deo*. "This phrase literally refers to something that takes place in the presence of, or before the face of, God. To live *Coram Deo* is to live one's entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, to the glory of God." (R.C. Sproul blog post, "What Does 'coram Deo' Mean?" Ligonier Ministries).

The church of both the Old and New Testament seemed to understand *coram Deo* far better than we do. They knew that the face of God was ever turned toward them. In our culture, we tend to believe we can compartmentalize our lives. God is for my quiet time and for Sunday mornings but not for my workplace or the golf course. Depending on how you look at it, *coram Deo* can be incredibly comforting or totally horrifying.

I think in the context of Psalm 91 it's meant to bring comfort. It tells us that not one single moment of our past, present, or future pain and suffering will be hidden from God's sight. His



loving and gracious eyes are trained upon us in an unwavering gaze; “indeed, he who watches over Israel (and you) will neither slumber nor sleep” (Psalm 121:4). It’s like when my kids were toddlers, the hyper-vigilance required to keep them from “disaster” exhausted me. My only reprieve was once they were finally asleep. But God not only watches all through the day, He also keeps watch all through the night. We are never out of His sight.

But what of the second implication of *coram Deo*? The things I’d rather He not see? I actually thought of this phrase in conjunction with Monday’s *Imago Dei*. We are called to reflect the image of God to others as we see the image of God in them, and we do both *coram Deo*, before the face of God. To me this means that all of my life is laid bare before God. In terms of racism this means that it not only matters what I say in public but also what I say in private, and even more importantly, how I think about others. My thoughts form my actions, so if I don’t take every one captive and hold it up to the light of the Word, there’s no telling where my heart and might be led “for the mouth speaks what the heart is full of” (Luke 6: 45).

I am a feisty driver. I have lots of opinions about how others should conduct themselves on the road and often these “opinions” spill out verbally while I’m driving. But one day, out of the blue, as I was calling someone a “freakin’ idiot” (I know, not becoming of a Bible study leader) I heard very clearly, “that’s my child, created in My image.” I seriously felt like I had been kicked in the gut and out loud, alone in my car, I said, “Lord I’m so sorry...” That might seem like a small thing but it’s not. It’s a symptom of something much, much bigger. It’s the bigger thing of the us/them mentality. It’s the bigger thing of pride. It’s arrogance. It’s disdain. The definition of disdain is sobering. Disdain is a feeling of contempt for someone or something regarded as unworthy or inferior: scorn. (Webster’s) Disdain and scorn are how the Pharisees and the Roman soldiers looked upon Jesus with as he hung on the cross. God help me if I ever look at another human being like that!

Every time I name call, even if the actual words never leave my mouth, I move a little further away from my brothers and sisters. Remember the old saying, “if you can’t say it to their face, you shouldn’t say it at all.”? I’d take it one step, one GIANT step further, “if you can’t say it (or think it) before the face of God, don’t!” Racism is not a mouth issue or even an action issue. Racism is a heart issue. And the thing about living life *coram Deo* is that God doesn’t need your permission to read your heart. He’s doing it all the time. It’s painful to see the darkness that lives there. But just like when you were a little kid, walking in the dark is less scary when you’re not alone. Psalm 91 reminds us that we are never alone, even in the darkest recesses of our hearts.

Prayer Focus: *Coram Deo*:

“Remember that thought is speech before God.” Charles Spurgeon

## #44: Uncertainty, by Susie Renzema

### Focus Verses: 11-16

“For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go.  
They will hold you up with their hands so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone.  
You will trample upon lions and cobras; you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet!  
The Lord says, ‘I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name. When they call on me, I will answer, I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them.  
I will reward them with a long life and give them my salvation.’”

### Meditation:

Yesterday my husband and I drove two and a half hours to Indiana to have lunch, and not for the reasons you might think. Not because I just couldn’t stand one more meal out of my own kitchen or because I desperately needed a change of scenery, although both are true. We drove two and a half hours to Chesterton, Indiana because we got to see our daughter for the first time in 3 months and I would have driven even further for that hug and long lunch.

The last time we saw Chloe was on March 8 when we said good-bye to her and her fiancé after having them home for a family wedding. We hugged them at the restaurant we went to for lunch after church and said good-bye. I had plans to go to Chicago a couple of weeks later to go dress shopping for her upcoming wedding, we had plans, we had expectations. We had no idea what was coming. I had no idea how much I would miss going to church, hugging people, going to lunch, and making plans. All things I took totally for granted on March 8.

I feel like James 4: 13-17 make so much more sense to me now:

“Look here, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit.’ How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it’s here a little while, then it’s gone. What you ought to say is, ‘If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that.’ Otherwise you are boasting about your own pretentious plans, and all such boasting is evil. Remember, it is a sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.”

The truth is, we still don’t know what’s coming. We actually never do. But still we plan, of course we do, we need to make plans, life would be a mess without any planning. What

COVID-19 has taught me though, is that I need to hold my plans loosely and I need to submit them to the Lord.

It's verse 17 that gets me, it almost seems out of place, but of course it's not. "Remember it is a sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it." What exactly does he mean? What I think, what I feel like I've learned over these last almost 90 days, is that I need to stop idolizing my plans. I need to stop putting my plans before the plans of God.

Let me explain, I don't intentionally put my plans above God's but I get going so fast that there's no room for His plans. There's no margin in my life, so when He points out His agenda, I'm often scrambling to fit it in. When I look at Psalm 91:13 I see the lions and cobras and serpents that I need to get under my feet are the sin of self-sufficiency. The section heading in my Bible says, "Warning about Self-Confidence."

Another lesson of COVID-19 is that I have no power to change any of this, all the self-confidence and self-sufficiency in the world is no match for this virus or for the currently heart breaking state of our nation. I am not the answer. God is. "The uncertainty of life should make us ready to recognize what is **good** and then **do it**. This uncertainty of life is not a cause either for fear or inaction. It is always a reason for realizing our complete dependence on God." (Moffatt) Can you hear the freedom in that? The uncertainty of life is not a cause for fear or inaction, it's a reminder of our complete dependence on God. And when I completely depend on Him Psalm 91: 14-16 are my comfort and promise;

"The Lord says, 'I will rescue those who love me.  
I will protect those who trust in my name.  
When they call on me, I will answer,  
I will be with them in trouble.  
I will rescue and honor them.  
I will reward them with a long life  
and give them my salvation."

This coming Sunday marks day 91. Almost 91 days ago we began sheltering in place and as a church we started to pray and meditate on Psalm 91. As I look at the completion of this time of corporate meditation and prayer there are some things I've come to understand and still so much that I don't. But that's ok, God can more than handle my lack of understanding because He understands everything and in Him I can have complete confidence.

### Prayer Focus: Reflection

As you meditate over these past three months, are there things that seemed certain to you before that aren't as certain anymore? Talk to the Lord about how these new uncertainties have affected you. Take some time today to thank Him that nothing is uncertain to Him, and that He can weave all these things together in beautiful ways that only He can do.

## #45: Out of the Chaos, by Becky Sytsema

Focus Verses: Psalm 91 overview

### Meditation:

I'm proud of Jack. There are many, many reasons, of course, but this isn't a Facebook post meant to celebrate his many qualities as a husband and father (although, if you friend me you might get some of those.) What I'm referring to here is a message he delivered this past Sunday that blew me and so many others away. If you have not yet heard it, it's worth the time. You will be encouraged in a time of great discouragement, inspired to move forward in a time when most of us don't know what to do, and challenged to look at all the events of the past few months in a whole new, prophetic way. (Here are the links: [Video](#) [Audio](#))

Over these past three months, I've never once doubted that God has been at work. I can point to many things that I am deeply grateful for during this time. For example, I have appreciated the Lord allowing me to dust off my love for writing and discover a bit of my own voice through these meditations. I also had a front row seat to his miracle-working power in saving the life of my son, Nicholas. Despite the challenges and uncertainties, He has proven to me that Psalm 91 is full of His passion, His mercy, and His promise-keeping love for me and my family. But I would have to shrug my shoulders if I were asked what God could possibly be doing through the COVID-19 crisis, whose disturbing headlines were so abruptly displaced by headlines of a disease far more pervasive and with even greater power. Racism. These past months feel like a one-two punch.

Here's where Jack's message comes in. Wrapped in the middle of this inspiring exhortation, Jack teaches from the book of Haggai where God's people became discouraged about building the temple. They began to say, "now is not the time to build God's temple," (Haggai 1:2). Jack then relates it to what's happening here and now. He said:

"I think that's what the enemy wants us to do right now with this situation that's going on with racism and reconciliation and self-examination and reflection. He wants to get us to say, 'now is not the time. We'll do it another time.'

Jack goes on, "I can't help but think that this whole COVID experience is tied into how God wants us to respond to the racism epidemic that is happening as well. I'm just wondering if God had to get us to pull away from society a little bit and get some of us to stay at home for three months so He could actually speak to us about racism. I'm wondering if this was a strategic plan of God's to say, 'I want you to listen to Me. I want to call you out to be My priests, to be My representatives.' And God's looking for a response. ...A lot of times we think repentance is asking God for forgiveness. And that is true. But true repentance is doing what

God has called you to do in the first place. What God has called us to do now is not some new calling. It's what He called us to do in the first place. See, I think God is making a lot of us restless right now. 'What am I going to do? How am I going to respond? Do I go downtown, or do I stay home? What do I say? What do I post?' We're restless. We're not sure what to do. And I think God is inviting us saying, 'Come into a deeper relationship with Me right now, and I will give you the prophetic revelation you need.'

"See, we're only going to find peace in our relationship with God. We human beings, we've been created in the image of God. And Satan comes in and he's always trying to get us into chaos. Thankfully, God comes in time and time again and pulls us out of the chaos. Because God has a lot of stake in us. He has called us to represent Him to a broken and a lost world. As image-bearers, we are created to reflect God. And if I fail to become the image-bearer that God has created me to be, then I fail to be Jack. If you fail to become the image-bearer that God has created you to be, then you never become yourself. Because you'll never be who you truly are.

"If you're feeling unsettled right now, if you're wondering, 'what is my role in all of this?'; if you're wondering, 'where is my place?'; if you're wondering 'how do I use my voice?' -- let me say to you, do not let the enemy make you discouraged. God is leading you. He's leading us as a church and as a community. He has us in His school to learn how to love and to love better. I talk to so many people who feel condemnation right now, and aren't sure what to do. And they are tempted to say, 'now is not the time.'

"I love that (Haggai 1) verse 12 says, 'The whole remnant of God's people began to obey the message from the Lord their God.' And God responds in verse 13, 'I am with you.' And then in verse 14 it says, 'The Lord sparked their enthusiasm.' In the ESV it says, 'The Lord stirred them up.' God will stir up your enthusiasm. God's going to give you the right desires. He's going to show you what you need to do.

"There's this little old book called, *The Wisdom of the Sands* (originally written in French by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry). And in this book, there's a quote: 'If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood, and don't assign tasks and work. But rather, teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.' If you want people to build a ship, you teach them to love the sea. Because when you love the sea, you want to build the ship. See, that's what God does for us. He didn't just say to the Israelites, 'Go get some wood, go bring it down and build My temple, and once you get all the work done, then I'll come in and I'll be with you.' No. They showed a little bit of effort and God says, 'I am with you!' and He says, 'I will give you the enthusiasm to do what I've called you to do.'

And I believe that is what God is going to do in each of us: that God is going to stir up emotions and our enthusiasm. ...And then the chapter ends in verse 14 by saying, "And then they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts their God." They worked on the temple. But that was only after God had given them passion, after He had stirred up their emotions. After

God said, 'I will be with you.' See, this is how God works. You show up and He'll give you the right passions. He'll give you the right desires. He will call you out of chaos, and He'll set your feet upon a rock. And He'll give you a message. And He'll give you prophetic revelation. And you're going to do what He's called you to do.

"That's the stand we need to take right now. As we are staring down in the face of this enemy, racism, and we are not sure what to do, the God who says, 'I am with you,' -- He knows what I need to do and what you need to do and what we need to do as a church and as a community. He's going to show us how to love well; how to serve well. He's going to show us how to speak grace. But we need to show up, and say, 'God, here I am.' We need to come out of the chaos and say, 'God, here I am. Send me.'"

There's much more to this message, and I encourage you to mine that gold on your own. But for now, this is my last meditation in this "91 For 91" project. In a previous meditation, Susie Renzema asked us to consider how we want to come out of this crisis. Now, at the end of this intense time that we've all experienced, it seems as though we may have more questions than we had three months ago. But as we approach the end of these 91 days, I thank God for the amazing evidence of His Psalm 91 protection for me and my family and my friends and my church and my city. So, here's how I want to come out of this crisis. I am determined that as I move forward into whatever the future holds, I will come out of the chaos and say, "God, here I am. Send me."

I hope the same for you!

May the Lord your God fill you with hope and peace and enthusiasm for all He has in store for you as you come out of the chaos.

### Prayer Focus: Come Out of the Chaos

How do you want to come out of this crisis? What is your bottom line moving forward? If you are unsure, that is your prayer focus today and in the days to come until you are sure. If you know how you want to come out of this, that is your prayer focus. Ask God for the enthusiasm and passion to follow Him forward. Either way, the only sure way to come out of this well is to spend time with the Lord your God, rebuilding the house of the Lord in your heart

## #46: The Doctrine of Sovereignty, by Susie Renzema

Focus Verses: Psalm 91 overview

### Meditation:

Looking back on the decision to write on Psalm 91 for 91 days, I have to laugh at my boldness to take on such a task! After all, I have never attended a single seminary class, have no formal biblical training and only started reading the Bible in earnest over the last several years. However, in my opinion, reading the Bible isn't so much a decision that I make as one that makes me. Over the years, I have been shaped by the Word of God and I have been changed in ways that I could never have imagined. I believe that all of that reading was preparation for this time and I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to try my hand at writing these meditations.

In a previous meditation I asked the question, "how do you want to come out of this time of forced reprieve from regular life?" And on Wednesday Becky asked what we had learned during this time. The answer to the first question is that I want to emerge from this time of sheltering with more focus and more intentionality in my relationships. I have sought to do a fair amount of internal housecleaning and I have finally had the chance to spend long amounts of uninterrupted time in the Word and in repentance, prayer, and study.

The answer to the second question is a little harder to articulate. In the last six or so years I have had a re-awakening to the theology that I grew up with but rejected in my twenties, thirties, and most of my forties. But over the last 91 days it has been my continuous source of comfort. I'm talking about the doctrine of sovereignty.

Sovereignty is defined as "supreme power or authority." For many people, the idea that God has total control over the universe leaves them cold. It seems to them that God set the world in motion and now stands back with an almost spiteful sneer as he watches us try to live amid chaos and disorder. Like people who watch dog fights, the dogs are not creatures to care for or love, they only exist for the entertainment of the viewers. In such a worldview, the suffering we experience is at best random, and at worst planned by a malevolent God.

This is an incorrect view of God's sovereignty, however. Within the doctrine of sovereignty, my suffering, although from the hand of God, is only permitted for my good. According to A.W. Tozer: "When I understand that everything happening to me is to make me more Christlike, it resolves a great deal of anxiety." How, you might ask, does this resolve my anxiety? I think the answer lies in my response to another question: do I believe the purpose of my life is to become more Christlike and to reflect the glory of God? If the answer is yes, then sovereignty

makes perfect sense and brings me comfort because a sovereign God only allows that which will make me more like his Son.

In terms of COVID-19 and the current racial crisis in our country, how can these make me more Christlike? If they produce in me a confident response that a good and loving “supreme power and authority” is ultimately in control and they convict me to love my neighbor as myself because that will bring glory to God, then they are redeemed for good. “Temptations and sorrows come to Christians and non-Christians alike. The question is: How shall we meet them? Clearly, if we must face them with no clear certainty that they are controlled by God and are permitted for his good purposes, then they are meaningless, and life is a tragedy. That is precisely what many existentialists say. But if God is still in control, then such circumstances are known to him and have their purpose.” (Boice)

I have comfort amid all the fear and uncertainty of this current time we’re living in because I trust God, and I trust God by knowing His character that is revealed to me in His Word. God loves us and He’s for us. He provides for us in a million ways every day and He cares about everything we are going through. “What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us?...Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:31, 35, 37-39

And as I take this last look at Psalm 91, at least for now, I see 16 verses declaring the sovereign power and love of a good God. A God in total, loving control provides for the psalmist amid disease, terror, dread, and darkness. He provides rest, safety, shelter, refuge, and angels to protect him. Verse two is critical to me because it states my part in this relationship.

“This I declare about the Lord; He alone is my refuge, my place of safety;  
he is my God, and I trust him.”

Whether I currently see the rescue, provision, or deliverance I declare my trust in my sovereign God and as I continue walking with him through whatever comes, he says to me;

“...I will rescue those who love me,  
I will protect those who trust in my name.  
When they call on me, I will answer,  
I will be with them in trouble.  
I will rescue and honor them.  
I will reward them with a long life  
and give them my salvation.” Psalm 91:14-16

That is sovereignty, that is our God, and that is my hope. I pray it is yours too.



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*SECTION 2:*

*SCRIPTURE JOURNALING PLANS*

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# Scripture Journaling Plan: The Character of God A-Z, by Susie Renzema

**Abides:** 1 John 4:12

**Able:** Romans 16:25-27

**Beginning:** Genesis 1:1-2

**Blameless:** Psalm 51:4

**Blessed:** Ephesians 1:3-4

**Cares:** Psalm 8:4; 1 Peter 5:6-7

**Deliverer:** Psalm 18:2; Psalm 40:17

**Endures:** Psalm 106:1

**Encouragement:** Romans 15:5-7

**Eternal:** Deuteronomy 33:27

**Faithful:** Deuteronomy 7:9

**Forever:** 2 John 1:2

**Forgiving:** Psalm 86:5

**Gentle:** Matthew 11:29

**Good:** Psalm 34:8; Psalm 86:5

**Healer:** Psalm 30:2; Isaiah 53:5

**Holy:** Psalm 111:9; Isaiah 6:3

**Interceding:** Romans 8:34; Isaiah 53:12;  
Hebrews 7:25

**Just:** 1 John 1:9; Romans 8:33; Galatians 3:8

**Kind:** Hosea 11:4; Romans 2:4; Titus 3:4-5

**Love:** Jeremiah 31:3; John 3:16; John 13:34;  
Galatians 2:20

**Majestic:** Exodus 15:11

**Maker:** Psalm 95:6

**Mediator:** 1 Timothy 2:5

**Merciful:** Exodus 34:6; Deuteronomy 4:31;

Psalm 103:8

**Near:** Romans 13:11

**Overseer:** 1 Peter 2:25

**Overcomer:** John 16:33

**Oath-Keeper:** Deuteronomy 7:8

**Patient:** 2 Peter 3:15; 2 Peter 3:9

**Perfect:** Hebrews 5:9; Hebrews 7:28

**Quiet:** Zephaniah 3:17

**Redeemer:** Exodus 6:6; Galatians 3:13;  
Psalm 19:14; Lamentations 3:5-8;  
Hebrews 9:15

**Savior:** 2 Samuel 22:2-3; Isaiah 43:3;  
Hosea 3:4; John 4:42

**True:** 2 Samuel 22:31;  
1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 John 5:20-21

**Trustworthy:** Psalm 93:5; Psalm 111:7

**Unchangeable:** Hebrews 6:16-18; Job 23:13

**Upholding:** Psalm 37:17; Psalm 145:14;  
Hebrews 1:3

**Victorious:** 1 John 5:4; 1 Corinthians 15:54

**Wise:** Psalm 51:6; Proverbs 2:6

**Wonderful:** Psalm 9:1; Psalm 139:14;  
Isaiah 9:6; Isaiah 25:1

**Exalted:** Psalm 97:9

**Yoke:** Matthew 11:29-30

**Zealous:** Isaiah 9:7

## Scripture Journaling Plan: The God of All Comfort (18 Day), by Susie Renzema

- Day 1: Isaiah 35:4
- Day 2: Matthew 6: 25-34 (Journal the verse of your choice)
- Day 3: Philippians 4: 6-7
- Day 4: Psalm 119: 75-77
- Day 5: Isaiah 66: 12-13
- Day 6: 2 Corinthians 1: 3-7
- Day 7: Philippians 2: 1-2
- Day 8: Isaiah 51: 12-16 (Journal verse 12)
- Day 9: John 14: 27
- Day 10: Joshua 1: 9
- Day 11: Psalm 23: 4
- Day 12: Psalm 34: 4-7
- Day 13: Psalm 94: 19
- Day 14: Romans 8: 38-39
- Day 15: Deuteronomy 31:6
- Day 16: Isaiah 41:10, 13
- Day 17: Psalm 56: 3-4
- Day 18: Psalm 46: 1

## Scripture Journaling Plan: God Hears (29 Day), by Susie Renzema

- Day 1: Acts 10:31
- Day 2: James 1:5
- Day 3: Psalm 65:2
- Day 4: Psalm 17:1
- Day 5: Hebrews 5:7-8
- Day 6: Acts 10:1-4
- Day 7: 1 John 5:14-15
- Day 8: Psalm 66:17-20
- Day 9: Psalm 34:4-6
- Day 10: John 9:31
- Day 11: Matthew 21:22
- Day 12: 1 Peter 3:12
- Day 13: Proverbs 15:29
- Day 14: James 5:15-16
- Day 15: John 14:14
- Day 16: Isaiah 59:1-2
- Day 17: John 16:22-24
- Day 18: James 4:1-3
- Day 19: Romans 10:8-10
- Day 20: Psalm 34:17
- Day 21: Mark 11:24-25
- Day 22: Philippians 4:6-7
- Day 23: Matthew 6:6
- Day 24: Psalm 4:3
- Day 25: Psalm 5:1-3
- Day 26: Psalm 6:8-9
- Day 27: 1 Kings 18:24
- Day 28: Matthew 12:35-37
- Day 29: Psalm 139:4

## Scripture Journaling Plan: Our Mighty, Powerful, Sovereign God!, by Susie Renzema

I'm weary. It's May 1 and we're still here, sheltering in place. The weather is still more gray than sunny and it feels easier to do nothing rather than tackle all those projects that I was so excited to have the time for. I know this feeling will pass, but today is just one of those days. I was tempted to re-post an earlier Scripture journaling plan, I have quite a few that are relevant to the time we're in. But then I asked myself, "what do you need right now? What truth do you need to drill down into your soul?" Because that's why I do this, and that's why I share it every month, I write what I need and many of you need the same thing and so we've been on this journey for a while now.

What I need right now is a BIG GOD! I need a God who is bigger than coronavirus, bigger than the government, bigger than the doctors and the scientists, bigger than nature. And that is exactly what I have, He's not only bigger, He's the sovereign creator of it all. And more importantly, He is the God who loves me and cares tenderly for me. He's the ultimate hero.

This month we are immersing ourselves in Scripture that conveys how big and powerful He is, and that would be kind of frightening if it weren't for His great love for us as the counterbalance to His power and majesty. I have been reminded over and over again during this time how important it is to know the Character of God, to know as best I can who He is with unwavering faith. That is my anchor right now, I serve a good God, a loving God, but also a powerful God who is working His perfect plan in each of our lives through this pandemic. Why it has to be this way I do not know, but in these words of Charles Spurgeon I find comfort...

"remember this,  
had any other condition been better for you  
than this one in which you are,  
divine love would have put you there."

## Our Mighty, Powerful, Sovereign God!

Day 1:	Psalm 24: 7-10
Day 2:	Exodus 15: 11
Day 3:	Zechariah 14: 9
Day 4:	Deuteronomy 4: 39
Day 5:	1 Chronicles 29: 10-12
Day 6:	Psalm 50: 1-2
Day 7:	1 Timothy 1: 17
Day 8:	Luke 1: 37
Day 9:	Job 37: 22-24
Day 10:	Psalm 89: 8-11
Day 11:	1 Peter 5:6-7
Day 12:	Ephesians 3: 14-16
Day 13:	1 Samuel 2: 1-2
Day 14:	2 Chronicles 20: 6
Day 15:	Psalm 93
Day 16:	Isaiah 43: 10-13
Day 17:	Job 42: 2-3
Day 18:	Jeremiah 10: 6-7
Day 19:	Deuteronomy 10: 14-15
Day 20:	Acts 17: 24-26
Day 21:	Psalm 150: 1-6
Day 22:	Isaiah 9: 6-7
Day 23:	1 Timothy 6: 15-16
Day 24:	Revelation 15: 3-4
Day 25:	Nehemiah 9: 6
Day 26:	Psalm 47: 7-9
Day 27:	Hebrews 1: 1-4
Day 28:	Revelation 4: 11
Day 29:	Isaiah 40: 25-28
Day 30:	Psalm 29: 1-5
Day 31:	Psalm 29: 6-11

## Scripture Journaling Plan: Attributes We Share with God (30 Day), by Susie Renzema

The verses I have chosen for this month are based on 10 attributes of God that we, as Christians, share with Him. Although we will never share in them to the same degree as He because we are not perfect, we were still created to display these attributes to the world. The 10 ten attributes I have chosen are from Jen Wilkin's book, *"In His Image, 10 Ways God Calls Us to Reflect His Character"* the verse references are mine.

As you journal these verses, ask yourself how you might actively seek to see the Image of God in those you encounter daily. And how can you be that reflection as well. For those of you with young children, I would really encourage you to read these verses aloud with them and discuss how they also can seek out God's Image in their friends and classmates, whoever they come into contact with.

### **Holy:**

Day 1: Colossians 3: 11-14  
Day 2: Ephesians 1: 4  
Day 3: 1 Peter 1: 13-16

### **Loving:**

Day 4: John 13: 34-35  
Day 5: 1 John 4: 19-21  
Day 6: 2 John 1: 3-6

### **Good:**

Day 7: 1 Timothy 6: 17-19  
Day 8: 1 Thessalonians 5: 19-22  
Day 9: Matthew 5: 14-16

### **Just:**

Day 10: Deuteronomy 10: 17-19  
Day 11: Psalm 106: 2-3  
Day 12: Isaiah 1: 16-17

### **Merciful:**

Day 13: James 2: 12-13  
Day 14: Matthew 9: 12-13  
Day 15: Zechariah 7: 8-10

### **Gracious:**

Day 16: Colossians 4:6  
Day 17: Titus 2: 11-14  
Day 18: Psalm 145: 8-9

### **Faithful:**

Day 19: Lamentations 3: 22-24  
Day 20: Psalm 25: 8-10  
Day 21: Luke 16: 10-12

### **Patient:**

Day 22: Romans 12: 12-13  
Day 23: 2 Peter 3:9  
Day 24: Romans 9: 22-24

### **Truthful:**

Day 25: Proverbs 12: 17-19  
Day 26: Ephesians 4: 25  
Day 27: Zechariah 8: 16-17

### **Wise:**

Day 28: 1 Corinthians 1: 26-29  
Day 29: James 3: 17  
Day 30: Ephesians 1: 15-17

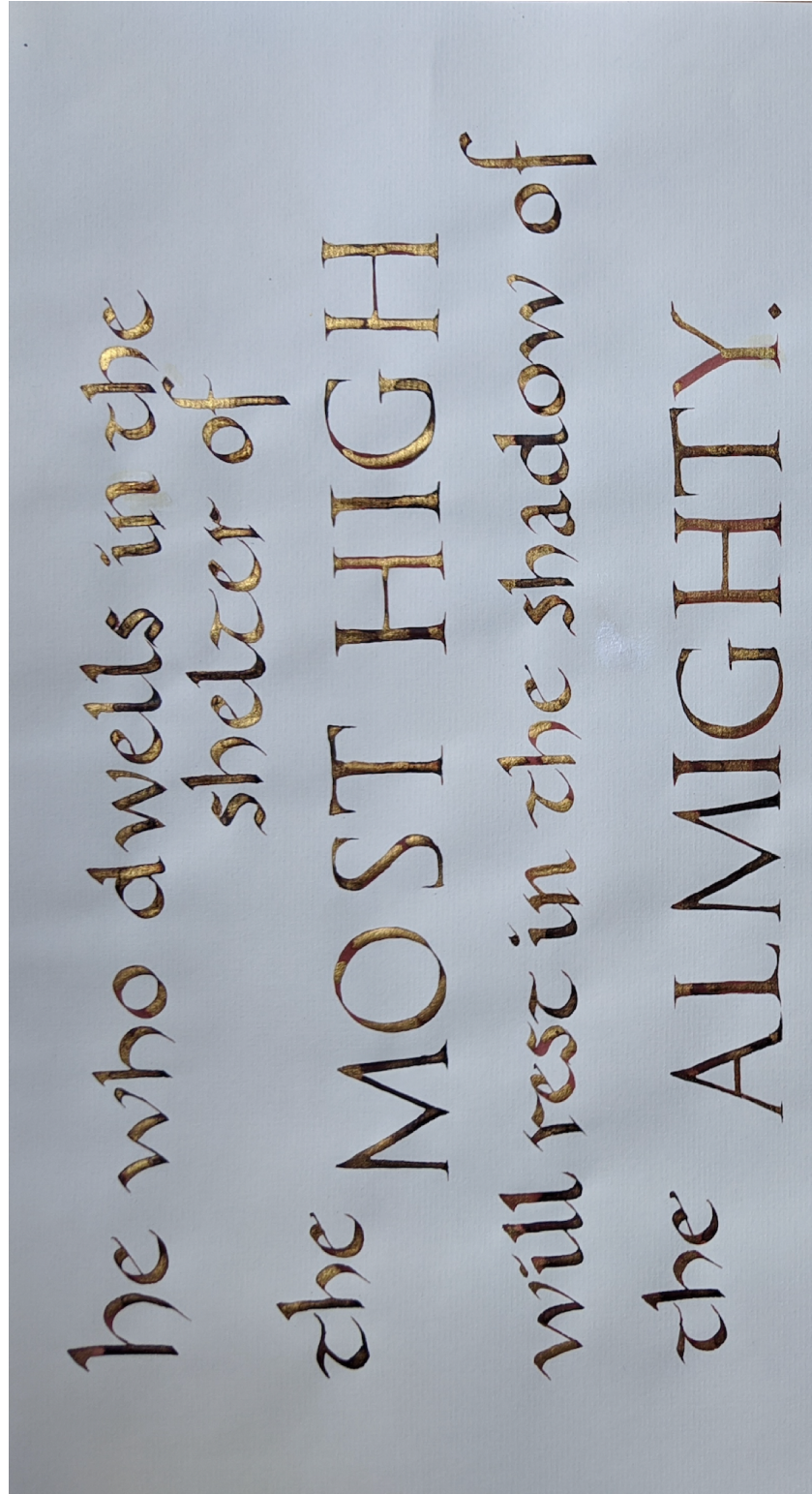
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*SECTION 3:*

*PSALM 91 CALLIGRAPHY ARTWORK*

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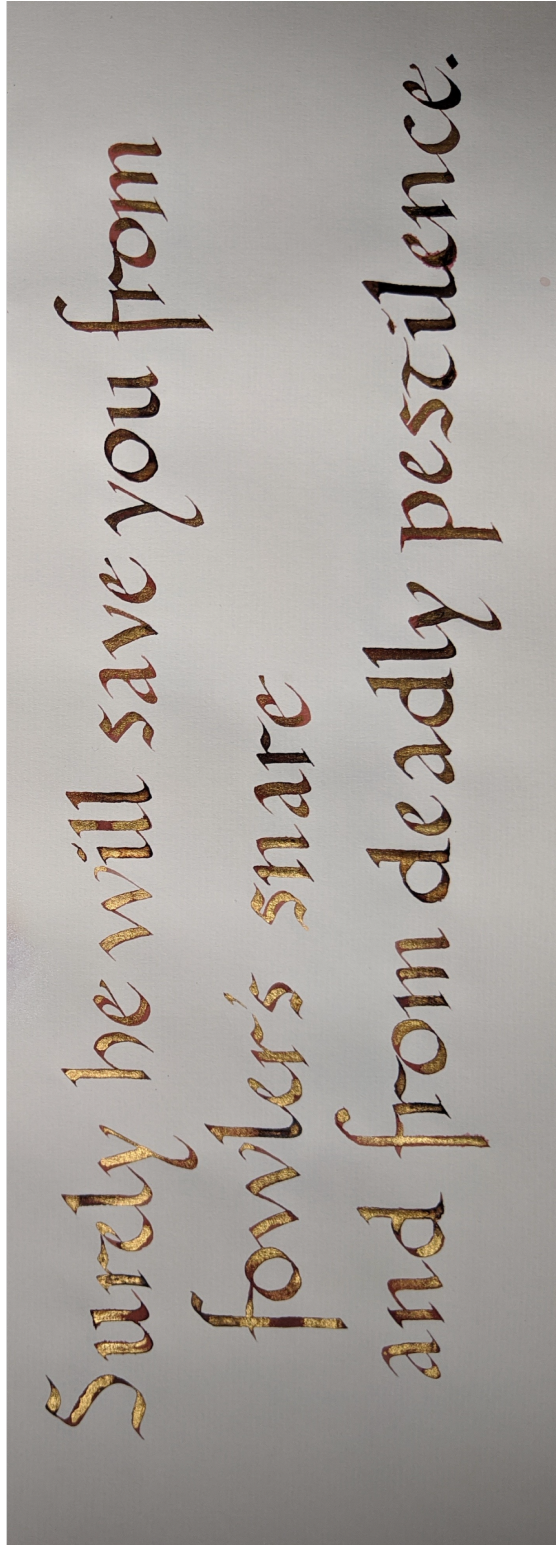




I will say of the LORD  
“he is my refuge and my  
fortress,  
my GOD in whom I  
trust.”

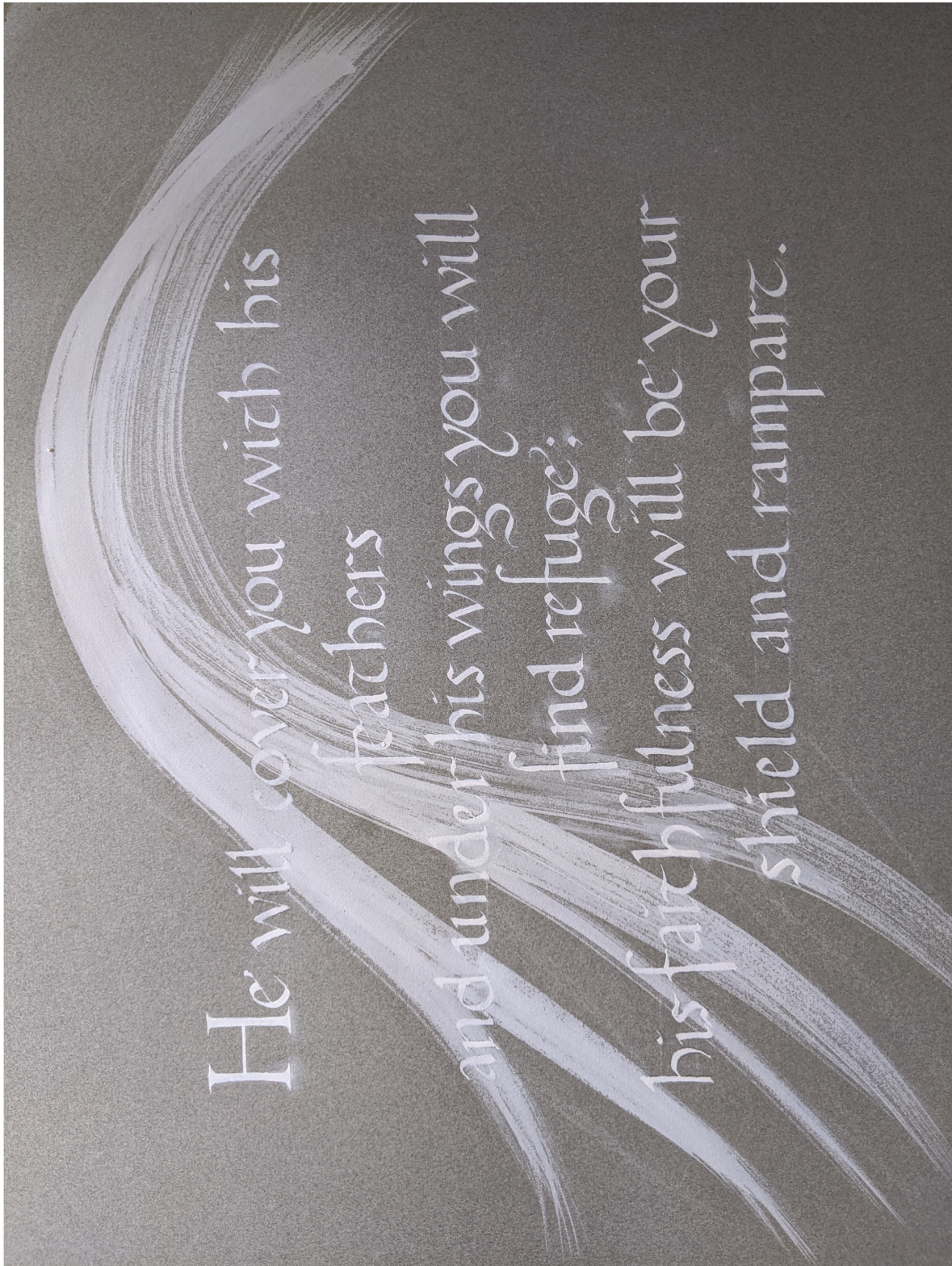


Psalm 91:3 Calligraphy by Donna Kemper



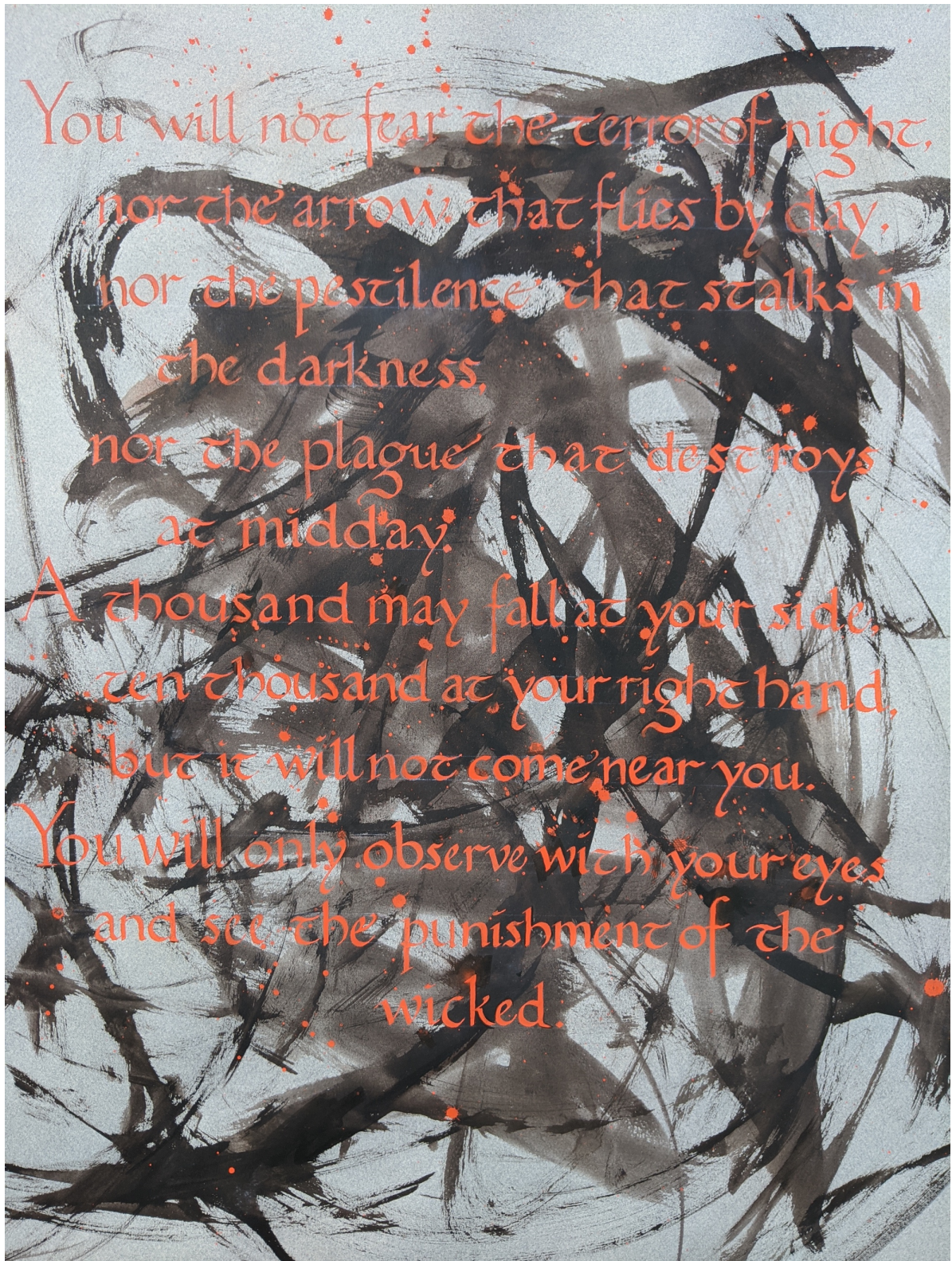


Psalm 91:4 Calligraphy by Donna Kemper

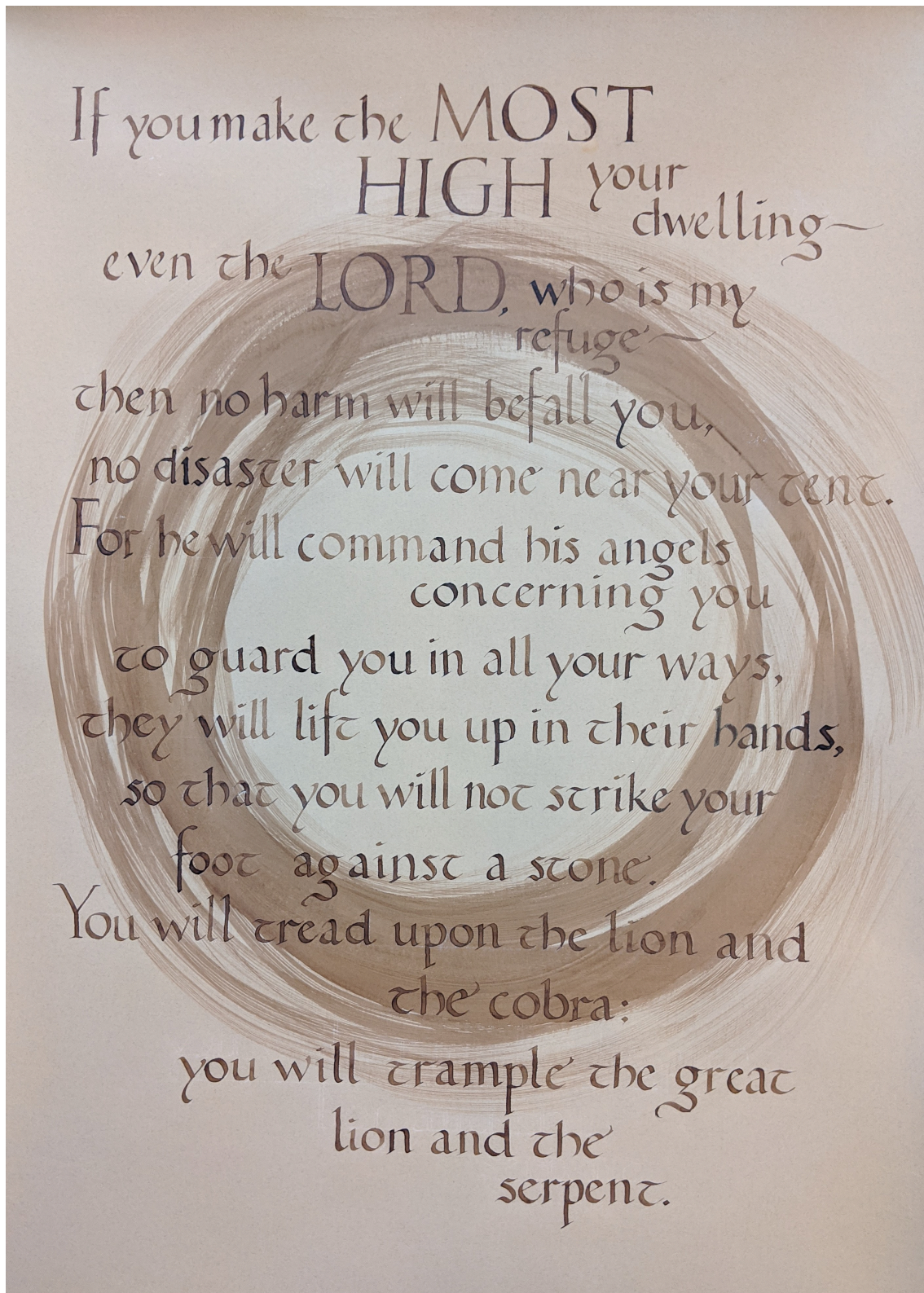




Psalm 91:5-8 Calligraphy by Donna Kemper

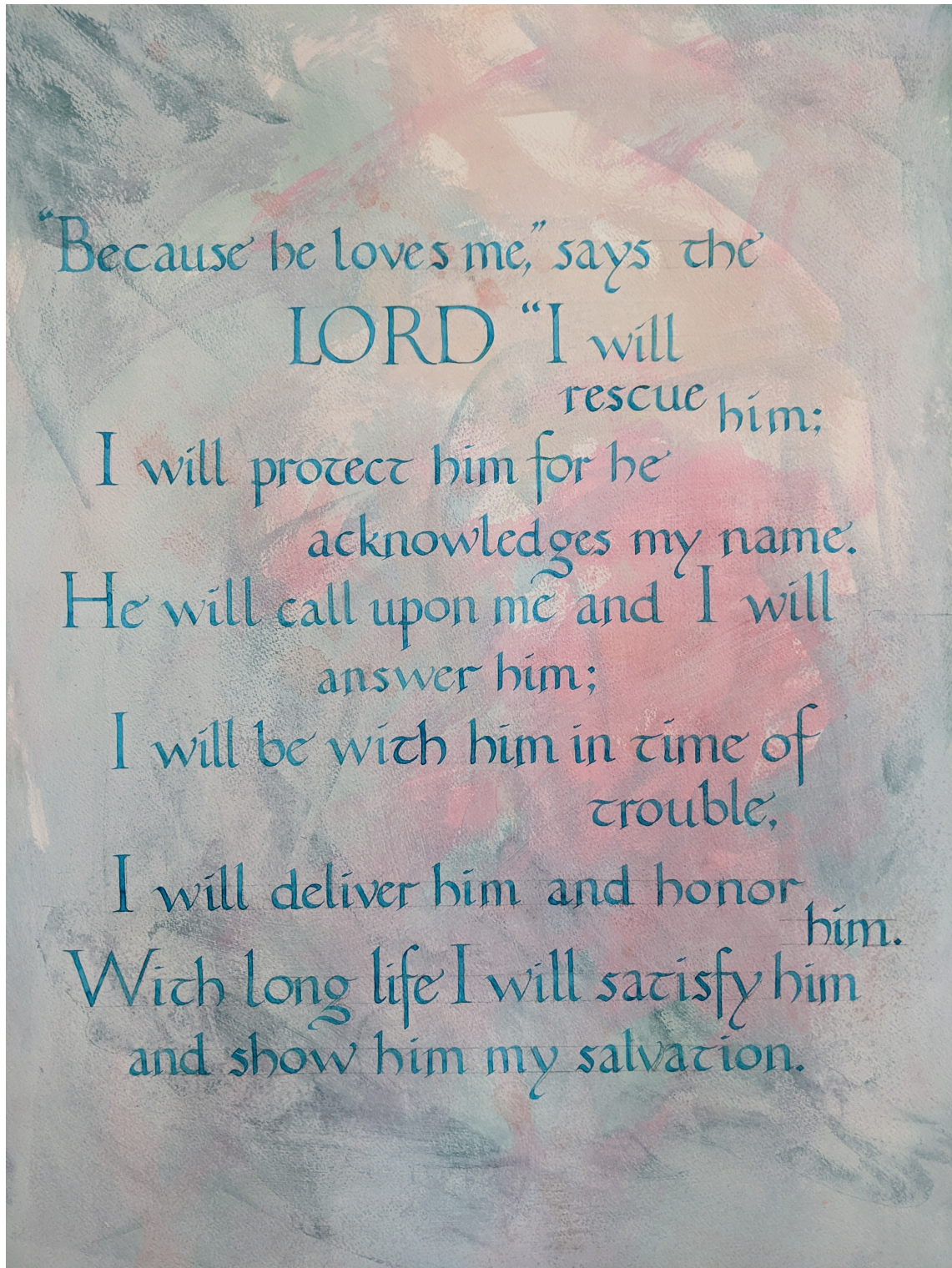






If you make the MOST  
HIGH your dwelling—  
even the LORD, who is my  
refuge—  
then no harm will befall you,  
no disaster will come near your tent.  
For he will command his angels  
concerning you  
to guard you in all your ways,  
they will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your  
foot against a stone.  
You will tread upon the lion and  
the cobra:  
you will trample the great  
lion and the  
serpent.





“Because he loves me,” says the  
LORD “I will  
rescue him;  
I will protect him for he  
acknowledges my name.  
He will call upon me and I will  
answer him;  
I will be with him in time of  
trouble,  
I will deliver him and honor  
him.  
With long life I will satisfy him  
and show him my salvation.

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