

WITH MY
EYES FIXED
TOWARDS HEAVEN
31 Devotions

by Sallie Ross

He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season. – Psalm 1:3

Our gracious God not only creates us, He plants us. He does what we cannot do. He finds just the right place– the place in which our roots have room and soil that will allow for our growth.. .according to the “tree” of us. He sees above; He sees below. And He knows that perfect place.

I am embarrassed to think of the number of times when, like a small child who didn't get her way and so picks up her toys and goes home, I attempt to pick up my roots and find another place in which to reside. I look around on the surface and see another spot that looks *much* more attractive, perhaps near other “trees” I would prefer to become forest with!

Where am I looking? Around. But the person the psalmist is writing about is one whose delight is in the law of the Lord, who meditates on that law day and night. Where is that person looking? At Jesus. That is what enables him to yield–to yield his life, his desires for placement, his heartaches, and disappointments. And from that yielding, comes the very fruit that has been watered by the Word and carries the aroma of Christ.

We do not plant ourselves, nor do we make fruit. So what sense it makes to keep watch for the Father. That we may let ourselves be drawn by the Light of the World, that our limbs may reach heavenward, our roots may shoot deeply into Him, that we might be unmoveable, except that He would move us.

- *Look around, where has the Lord planted you? Do you have an idea why?*
- *Give thanks for where you are–turn your eyes heavenward.*
- *Are there roots you have attempted to pull up on your own? Ask the Father to show you Himself, that you might more easily leave Him in charge of your roots*

But you are a shield around me, O Lord; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head. – Psalm 3:3

When life is easy and the spaciousness not terrifying, the thought of needing a shield around us seems almost odd—perhaps even prohibitive. It is as if there is a confidence that grows as obstacles are not encountered. But it is often not a confidence in God— rather in ourselves, or perhaps just the “okayness” of life right now.

Thankfully, more thankfully than we even know, God doesn’t look down and see that things are okay and pull away his protection, thinking someone else must need it more right now. “*You are a shield around me*” There is a steadying certainty to that in which life resides. Whether we seek the shield or even see the shield, without it we would be without life.

And within the intimacy of the Father’s protection, He pours out his glory on us and lifts up our head. There is a sense that we may not be looking at or even for Him. But it is He who enters our world, pouring out his glory and raising us to a place of being able to see, to receive, to encounter the One in whom we are tucked.

Give thanks to the Lord that He watches us with loving attentiveness, covers us with his love, bestows his glory upon our lives, and tenderly lifts our faces that our eyes might find His and find life.

I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains me. Ps3:5

The chorus of a wonderful Shaker song comes to mind as I read this verse:

“Tis a gift to be simple, tis a gift to be free, tis a gift to come down where we ought to be, and when we find ourselves in the place just right, we will be in the valley of love and delight.”

There is a simplicity to this verse in Psalms that often eludes us. When we sleep, when we wake, when we breathe or walk or whatever, it is not because of our own planning or design, it is because the Lord sustains us.

It is a richly simple fact, but somewhere it is laid aside for want of bigger truths, more complex reasonings. Why? There is something within us that wants to wrestle with truths. Receiving simplicity is hard for us. And so we battle and wrestle and often think we are lying down and sleeping because life is such a struggle and we're exhausted.

We are exhausted because we are battling in an arena in which God does not mean for us to be. Again He comes and longs to draw our gaze heavenward. That we might fall asleep not because of the exhaustion of the battle not even meant for us, but because we are resting in the peace of his love, in the place just right, in the valley of love and delight.

- *What are the places of some of my fiercest struggles?*
- *Against what am I struggling?*
- *Have I asked the Father into those struggles—or even to take them?*
- *If not, do so now. If so, pray for grace to trust his taking.*

In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation. Ps5:3

In the morning I come. As I awaken from my sleep, my mind is not yet cluttered. And so I come. And when I come I speak with you, and because doubt and worry have not yet taken up residence within, I am certain that you hear my voice. It is a soothing certainty.

The requests of my heart awaken with me, come to mind so soon after my heart awakens to you. So what I can do in that time is to take those requests and place them before you. The day is early and these requests have not yet taken on great proportion, so I can place them simply before you. And then as the psalmist says, I “*wait in expectation.*” It is in that place that you reside.

I wait in expectation, not wonder or dread or forgetting, but expecting. And in doing so, I am expecting Jesus.

O, Father, forgive me the times when I keep hold of my requests. Forgive me the times when I put them out for you but don't really expect you to be there. Forgive me the times when I am expecting miracles rather than Jesus. Your gentle brush paints page after page of my world with miracles, but what my heart needs is to have Jesus come along side me, that we might look at the requests together—a communion of hearts. In that holy companionship what is important to Jesus becomes important to me. O Father, be my vision as I wait.

*I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders
Ps9:1*

When I read this verse I am so aware of the things that are in my heart that do not lead me to praise, that do not lead me to telling of God's wonders. And my heart is grieved.

There needs to be a daily questioning—*What is in my heart? What all is harbored there?* Not that we might condemn ourselves, but that we might be honest. And in that honesty that we might be able to see where life is being taken as opposed to life being given. Just as in yesterday's reading where the psalmist was laying out his requests before God, when we are honest we find that what seemed to hold such destructive power within, loses magnitude and has so much less of a hold of us.

And then we read the words: *"I will tell of all your wonders"* When my heart is fearful, when anxiety longs to take residence within me, I often ask those close to me to *"talk Jesus to me"*. When we hear or speak of God's wonders, those words fall like a blanket upon our hearts—a blanket that covers the cold and lonely-feeling places, that tucks us in and keeps us safe, that comforts us that we might rest in Him.

Lord Jesus, draw the words of my mouth straight from your heart, that I may have your praise in my heart and on my lips. That I might speak of your wonders with a heart that mirrors your heart of love. That I might rest in you and gather others whose weary souls are dying for that same rest.

Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord have never forsaken those who seek you. Ps9:10

I remember a time when we were attending a large church in Kansas City. It was quite formal and we had chosen to come in and remain rather anonymous. That was what we *thought* we wanted. During communion on Sunday we would come forward with several hundred others, and file to the front of the church, eventually kneeling at the altar rail while lay and clergy leaders gave us communion. For several weeks we were able to do that anonymously, too.

One Sunday, however, as I knelt at the altar rail, the woman bringing the bread knew me and said: “*Sallie*, this is the body of Christ, broken for you”, and the man who followed her, also someone we knew, said: “*Sallie*, this is the blood of Jesus, poured out for you.” *I had been called by name* –I was pulled from anonymous to known, and my soul rejoiced in that “*knowing*” as I felt drawn into God’s heart.

We are to know God’s name, those things which identify his nature, tell us about Him, the words we speak that bring Him to life for us. We know the Father by seeking Him in his Word; we come to know his name and nature, and there is a drawing in, a trusting, an “at-homeness” that allows us, in the seeking, to find home.

- *What do you know of the nature of God from His Word?*
- *What do you know of the nature of God from experience?*
- *Close your eyes and whisper the name “Jesus”, and let your imaginings find his heart, find his comfort, find Him.*

But the needy will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the afflicted ever perish. Ps 9:18

We are handicapped by being caught in time and space. And so when our circumstances cause us to cry “needy”, the passing of time before there is response from our Father may seem an eternity. We long for “now” as the time when the Father would complete his healing work. But sometimes that completion is not seen on this side of Heaven.

This verse in Psalms speaks to a hope that the afflicted have, a hope that will never perish. What are we to make of that? What do we hope in? Do we hope in cures or the kindness of others, in restoration or even just relief? No, *hope is a person; it is our Lord Jesus*. Cures can give way to other disease—kindness to cruelty; restoration can once again crumble and relief yield to another sort of anguish. But Jesus. . . *Jesus is how God remembers us*. Jesus who sits at the right hand of the Father ever interceding for us.

What may feel like “forgotten” is not. In placing our whole heart’s hope in Jesus we will find that the person of Hope is whispering our name to the Father, day and night. And our hope will become that which brings us from darkness into light.

Father, forgive me the places where my hope is planted other than in You. Forgive me the places where I feel afflicted and abandoned and look to what isn’t rather than what is. Lord God I ask for the grace to be real with the hurts that distract me, so that I may be able to set my heart, my hope, my life in You alone.

You hear, O Lord, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more. PS 10:17-18

I love this picture of God. He *hears*; He *encourages*; He *listens*; He *defends*. It is such a strong and encouraging picture of who God is. Too often I know that I live my life as if it is up to me to be strong and God to stand by. What a waste of energy; what a loss of true life.

Interesting to note that while God is acting on behalf of the afflicted, it doesn't say that He answers *all* of the desires of the afflicted. So painfully often what we desire is not what is in the heart of God for us; often our desires would, in fact, short-circuit his full grace.

From this verse we also see how it is that we are to stand for one another. We are to be close enough to each other that we can hear one another's heart. We are to listen, which is a deeper thing than just hearing. We are to let that listening touch our hearts so that we can encourage and defend one another.

There is no absence of God's presence with us in affliction. May there be no absence of the Body of Christ either.

Thank you, Father, for your strength, for your passion, for You. Thank you that you strengthen me out of your love for me, that I may strengthen others. Teach me to receive, to embrace and to extend your passionate love—all for your glory, Lord; all for your glory.

Monday

Week Two

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever. . . But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me. Ps 13:1,5-6

David is gloriously real in the Psalms. He doesn't clean up his act before he comes before the Lord; he comes with real passion, despair, transparency to his soul.

But what I love about David is that he stays with the Lord. Whether the Psalm is short like this one, or a long, wrestling treatise, David stays with the wrestling until his eyes are drawn from self to Savior.

Here he begins with clear anguish, even contradicting what God has told him about Himself—that He won't forget David. And often the anguish continues for a long time. But just by being willing to bring the muck to God, David is able to receive the grace that lifts him from hubris to heaven.

At the core of David's soul is the realization of God's goodness; David remembers and knows he is remembered, knowing that even the deepest of despair is merely the path on which he finds the Lord.

Can we, in our world of "muchness" find way to come before the Father with *all* of our lives? Because when we can, what happens is that his light takes that muchness and clarifies, and we can see beyond the deception of overwhelm into the glory of the Lord.

- *What are you holding back from God? What seems too dark, too dumb, too distasteful?*
- *If it is true that the Father cares with the passion and the intimacy that He says, then what will it take to be able to pour out those dark places to Him?*
- *Ask for the grace—it will come.*

Tuesday

Week Two

The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. PS14:2

We long to understand. Because if we understand, it means that we know what is going on, that we are privy to the details, the inner-workings of a particular situation. We are then confident that we are “*in the know*”!

But that is not the kind of understanding that the Lord is looking for; He is looking for a people who know that there is one thing we are called to do, and that is to seek God. And then that we would not only know that, but that we would also actually be about the seeking.

It pulls me back to the rich words of Deuteronomy 6, words that are the instructions to us from our Father. Read these with me, and let the Lord make them a prayer from your lips:

*“Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you. Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. **Love the Lord your God with all your soul and with all your strength.** These commandments that I give to you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” Deut 6:3-9*

- *How do you see me, Lord?*
- *Am I really seeking You?*

Wednesday

Week Two

I said to the Lord, 'You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.'
Psalm 16:2

This challenges me tremendously. It challenges me because if it is true, then I should be living differently. I “know” that it is true, but the way I live does not line up with that knowing.

Rather than elaborate on how distracted we can be from the truth of this word, I would prefer for us to come to a place of reflective repentance, to enter the Lord’s presence that He might show us.

Loving Father, I come before you in deep need of clarity of vision. Father I confess to you that there is much in my life that I consider good apart from you. While I know that all good gifts come from you, I confess that I am often more taken by the gifts than by the giver. And I need to ask your forgiveness.

Father, expose my heart:

to the people I love more than you. . .
to the things that I put before you. . .
to the titles and importance that I seek before you. . .
to myself who I put before you. . .

Father please reveal to me the heart-changing truth that truly, apart from you, I have no good thing, and I need nothing but you.

Lord, hear my prayer. . .

Thursday

Week Two

"Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance." Ps 16:5-6

Sometimes we just forget. Sometimes, often in fact, we can so easily use circumstances as our measuring rod, that we lose sight of the expansiveness and the amazing graciousness of our Lord.

"You have made my lot secure" We often whine and say we feel insecure. *It doesn't matter how we feel, or even that we are insecure.* What matters is the constancy, the security of God. We can be as unsteady as anything; *"Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever"*. And that *assignment* from the Lord surrounds us in a way that allows us to explore His spaciousness of heart and take it into ourselves. Not only does He make us secure, but the place where He has us is described as "pleasant" and "delightful".

Forgive me, Father, when I complain about what I see of my world and don't even notice what You have given me. You show me your delight in me by the signature of your presence all around me. But I hurry by, almost as though I am looking for something better, failing to drink deeply of You. This is what You have given me—You who love me and draw me into your heart. Be Thou my vision. . .

Friday

Week Two

*You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”
Ps16:11*

I remember backpacking when I was a young teenager. We had climbed to a hillside to watch the sunset before crawling into our tents for the night. I stood on that hillside watching the sun set, amazed at the beauty but not even thinking there might be more—until someone else turned and saw. The light from the sun bled into rain in another direction, making what looked like pink rain. I turned yet again and saw a double rainbow. A final turn saw the top part of a distant peak dressed in a deep red. I was filled with joy and awe as I turned circles looking at first one beauty and then the next.

God’s joy, God’s pleasures, are like that. We tend to look in a certain direction for Him, and we see Him. But we are not experiencing his fullness. We have to be willing to turn, to look where we’re not used to looking, to expect beyond our expectations. And we must be in his presence. Here it says: *“You fill me with joy in your presence”*. Often I am away from Him and wondering where the joy is. The joy resides in Him; Jesus is our path of life who has been made known to us and we may choose.

Lord Jesus, I look in awe at you, I memorize the lines of your heart and taste of your goodness. But that is not all. Just when I feel as full as I can be, You take my face and turn my eyes, and there You are again—different but still You. And then again, and again . . . Sometimes it is too much for me. I am so aware of myself and my inadequacies, but then You take my face, search my eyes, and remind me that it is not about me. It is about You, Lord. Keep me in your presence—keep hold of my heart.

Saturday

Week Two

Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings. Ps 17:8

“*The apple of your eye*” is a phrase that can roll off our tongues and really have little meaning without thought. But for me, the contrast is what grabs me. Here is the God of the Universe—the Creator and Sustainer of all, with power beyond what we could ever imagine. And we are, to Him, the object of his affection—a tender, endearing attentiveness for us, from God.

Even knowing that as we can, there is a deep tenderness that emerges— a vulnerability of heart. And so the next part of this verse seems so appropriate “*hide me in the shadow of your wings.*” When I become aware of God’s love for me, I want to hide—not *from* Him, I want to hide away *with* Him. I want to be tucked away with Him where I might open myself more and more to the truth of the message of his love. It causes my heart to tremble with anticipation, and so I need that covering.

The intimacy of God’s love for us is something we cannot afford to gloss over. In that intimacy is the very lifeblood that we need in order to have endurance for the battles in the world. Just as one goes away with her lover, so we are called to go away with the Lover of our souls.

- *Spend a few minutes repeating “I am the apple of God’s eye” and then in silence “hear” the response in your heart.*
- *Imagine yourself tucked under the shadow of his wings. What would you be feeling? What would you be hearing from Him? What could you release that you hold on to so strongly right now?*
- *Let Him be your imagining.*

Sunday

Week Three

And I—in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness. Ps. 17:15

What is it to see His face? It is to see Him; it is to know Him; it is to stand before Him with a fixed gaze that allows us not to shy away in awareness of our own sinfulness, but rather to bring it to Him and exchange it for his presence.

What is it to be satisfied? Isn't that a question?! Satisfaction is a state of the soul that is so seldom found. We are rarely satisfied with ourselves, with our jobs, with our income, our marriages, our children, our homes, and on and on. And so with so much displeasure, where can the pleasure of the Father find its way into our hearts?

“When I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness” Can we say that? Can we keep our hearts on track long enough to be satisfied with seeing God? It feels bizarre to even ask that question, but it is very real in the way that we live out our lives.

If we don't stop and drink deeply of Him, we will not be satisfied. At the same time, we will never be satisfied anywhere else either.

And so our call as the Body of Christ is to carry his light within us, that our brothers and sisters may see that light and be drawn to drink deeply of all that is Him.

Lord Jesus, first of all, that I may be awakened to You. . .

He reached down from on high and took hold of me; He drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the Lord was my support. He brought me out into a spacious place; He rescued me because he delighted in me. Ps18:16-19

When we need to be rescued, it is because we are in trouble. This might bring to mind a picture of a parent coming to the rescue with an “*I told you so*” look smugly pasted on his face—doing the heroics required but also holding onto quite a speech to deliver after the threat of danger was passed.

While we can't be certain from these verses whether the disaster is solely because of others or because the psalmist stepped beyond bounds himself, what we *can* be certain of is the nature of our God.

He reached down from on high—He was clearly willing to abandon position for passion. *He took hold of me*—our God is intimate; He doesn't call from a distance but comes and gathers us. *He rescued me; He was my support*—again the strength with the intimacy. *He brought me out into a spacious place*—He doesn't just make do, He is our spaciousness. *He rescued me because He delighted in me*—He is prompted by his heart of love, and that heart is strength, and that heart is tenderness.

Amazing, no matter how we stumble, how broken we become, our Father waits to reach down from on high—for us—for me.

Lord Jesus, I can only imagine. Verse after verse of scripture shows me you, and still I can only imagine. Forgive me my straying. Thank you that you do for me what I can not do for myself—rescue me from my sin. Let me find home in the place of your spaciousness.

You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light." Ps 18:28

How this flies in the face of our work oriented culture. If we were being honest we would probably say "*You provide me with the energy to go find the oil so I can keep my lamp—your light—burning within me*" And we'll work hard and be dramatically noticeable as we're about that work. But that's not it.

You, Lord God, created my lamp. You are my oil, you are my light, you are the fuel of my heart and the clarity of my path. It is by grace, and grace that continues each moment of each day, that I am even *able* to receive your light and your life.

And when I realize that it's *not* me and that it doesn't *have* to be me, it is incredibly freeing. Then I can stop and let You do what I have been fighting against all this time. And then there is a holy rhythm in which I can be as You've created me to be, and You can be glorified.

Lord God, forgive me my striving; teach me to yield. Bring me the oil, kindle my flame, let me glorify You, Lord, let me glorify You.

- *What are the things that I am involved in that cause me to take more control than you call me to?*
- *Of those things, what have at the heart of them glorifying you?*
- *When I am searching for oil, remind me of my Source, please Father.*

“It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; He enables me to stand on the heights. He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great. You broaden the path beneath me, so that my ankles do not turn. Ps 18:32-36

God arms me, makes my way perfect, He enables me to stand, He trains me for battle, He gives me His shield, He sustains me, He stoops down to reach me, He broadens the path beneath me.

What more do I need? Why are we struggling to make our own way, to clear our own path, to devise our own plans and forge our own patterns? When the meal is served and placed before us, why do we get up from the table, go into the kitchen – with many ingredients missing—begin to create another meal?

It is God who is making our way perfect, and so as we attend to Him, we will begin to see the absurdity of our efforts, we will learn to lay down the plans of our own making, we will welcome Him along side.

- *Imagine a place in your life that is difficult for you*
- *Imagine yourself in that place, with God by your side*
- *Read these verses from Psalm 18 aloud, and with each action, imagine your Father doing those things for you, with you.*
- *Let your heart be thankful.*

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. Psalm 19:7-8

In order for something to be revived, there is a sense that it must be pretty much defeated. And how often is our soul defeated? How often does it feel full of only dust? Too often, I fear.

But God's Word—that which reveals Him to us— has the life and the breath to bring life to us. In the rightness of his Word, our hearts are filled with joy. And with the heart being reflected in our eyes—the Word gives light to our eyes.

You've seen the people; you've *been* the people. When you see them there is a light, a "*knowing*" if you will, that reflects from deep within them. It is the knowing of Jesus. It is a releasing of the light and life that live within us.

As we sit with his Word, as we sit with Him, that light grows more and more intense and fills us. It revives in us the places that are lost and longing. It revives in us the very image of the Father, in which we were made. And as it revives us, it provides light and warmth, passion and tenderness that offers shelter to those for whom hope is but a flickering candle or even long past.

Lord Jesus, plant me by the streams of Living Water. Plant me in your Word that my roots may be nourished, my heart strengthened, my life changed. That I may then offer the shelter of your wings to those who huddle near. That we all may rise up on wings like eagles; that we may show You, Lord, that we may show You.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer Ps. 19:14

In this verse, the psalmist knows that God is his Redeemer, and he wants to please Him. How much of “*pleasing*” we have lost in our world!

To want to please without really knowing the person is not what is being spoken of here. That kind of pleasing is, instead, an act of trying to find favor. With God we have found favor— big time!—and so the heart to please is not out of our own virtuosity or need, but rather in response to what He has done for us.

In order to act “*in response*”, however, we must be intimately aware of who God is and what He has done. And so the verse speaks of the meditation of our hearts. I am embarrassed to think of the things I “meditate” upon—from how to obtain things, to how to find rest, to how I can get out of something I don’t want to do, and on and on. Countless hours are spent planning and plodding through fields that have none of the heart of the Father within them.

The Father longs to place our faces in his hands, turns us that we might look fully into his eyes, his heart. That we might encourage one another to also stand in that place; that our focus might be changed and that our words would pour forth in praise of Him.

Psalm 145:3-7 takes us there, too:

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; His greatness no one can fathom. One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds. They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul. Ps 23:1-3a

My soul is broken—in need of restoration. Left to my own devices, I will make a mess of whatever is before me. But I am not left to my own devices. If I find myself there, it is because that is what I have chosen. I have a shepherd, *the Lord is my shepherd*.

He makes me lie down in green pastures—not “He makes me work”. Green pastures have soft grasses, not thick, prickly ones. They are places of comfort. He leads me beside quiet waters, where it is not distracting but soothing. He takes me to the place where He knows I can hear Him. And then He speaks with me—through presence, through my heart. The Lord is my Shepherd.

The restoration of my soul comes from his shepherding. He watches me; He knows what I need, even or especially when I don't. He doesn't discard me when I helplessly repeat my mistakes or don't have enough courage to step forth. He sits me down, He lets me trust Him, He bends down and whispers, He applauds my attempts, He strengthens the parts of me that need to remain, and He sits right there with me, until I can walk again.

The Lord is my shepherd. . .let me let Him be that. . .

and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Ps 23:6b

What is *forever*? How it feels when we've trapped ourselves in sin and can't see a way out? How long a day feels when our eyes are fixed on ourselves? How loneliness consumes us as we look other than to our Father for true comfort, for home?

Forever, I will *dwell* in the house of the Lord *forever*. To dwell is to make one's home. It is to *be* with, to linger, to pull back from the table after a meal with dear friends and continue to fill the evening with words and laughter, with silences and shared tears.

To dwell with God is to yield not to urgency but to peace.

And this is our promise, but it is not a dwelling that begins when we leave this earth. Our Father calls us to dwell with Him beginning now. He calls us to leave behind the things that pull us from Him. Even good things can pull us from Him. He calls us to watch for Him, to learn the rhythm of His breath, to awaken in the morning and look for Him, before our minds begin to look for anyone or anything else. He calls us to be available to Him, not for great Christian acts, but just for being.

Forever isn't an imagined place. Forever began before the creation of the world when God had us in mind. And since that moment, He has pursued us with the heart of such a lover.

Loving Father, give me the grace to be drawn by your pursuit, to lay down what keeps me from embracing You and receiving your embrace, and let us just be together...forever.

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul; in you I trust, O my God. Ps 25:1-2a.

When I first saw this verse, I was thinking about how it takes energy and trust to lift your soul to God. But what I then realized that circumstances can happen in life that make that perhaps a bit less tedious.

I remember in my teens and twenties when I backpacked a lot. When I was in really good shape, I would sometimes carry a fifty pound backpack. We would often hike several miles in a day with these packs on. What I remember more than anything on those hikes was what it felt like when I took my backpack off. Now mind you, it wasn't an easy thing to do. The straps had been pulled tightly against my shoulders and waist so it wouldn't flop around as I trudged across the hills. I had to loosen the straps, undo the belt and awkwardly get it off of my back. But then, as though I had been given eagle's wings, I felt myself almost lifting from the ground. It was as though there was no gravity—I was light and it felt wonderful! For a moment I even able to forget the throbbing pain that the weight had caused.

And so it is when we lift our soul to our God. It is our doing and it is his doing. It is ours to loosen the straps of bondage, to laboriously lift that awkward weight and put it down. And then the Father takes us and lifts us up. Our Father whom we trust brings us to Himself. Our Father who sent His only son to die for us, clothes us with new clothes—we need not return to that load of ours.

*“To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul; in you I trust, O my God”.
Raise me up, loving Father, take me into your arms. . .*

My eyes are ever on the Lord, for only He will release my feet from the snare. Ps 25:15

Sometimes I wonder if I even see the snare. Sometimes I wonder if I even know that my feet are caught.

But when I do know, when I can tell, I look quickly to the snare. I try to figure it out, think of ways I can be released, maybe ask others to help, unless denial keeps me off on my own.

But I don't turn to you, Lord, do I? At least not at first.

"My eyes are ever on the Lord". What would my life look like if that were true? It wouldn't be frantic, or hurried; I don't believe that I would be chasing after You as You ran across the hills with your robes flowing behind You. It wouldn't be too full or too empty. It would be purposeful. It wouldn't be cursory. It would be attentive.

We need one another in order to do this. We need to be like the hikers who carry compass and map, each checking, comparing data, following the directions of the Father's heart.

And the incredible thing is that while we often get so distracted by the snare, when we have our eyes on You, Lord, you release us and we walk with you, and often we lose sight of what once held us so captive.

Thank you, Lord, that you are a God of redemption—redeem my heart with your love.

One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His temple. Ps 27:4

Once again we come to the place of dwelling, and of knowing that this is not a great mystery or a far-off promise—this is for here and now. One thing the psalmist seeks—Jesus. And in that seeking comes dwelling, being with, gazing at, seeing Him as He truly is, not some artist's rendition or cinematic emasculation.

I love how the psalmist is not asking for healing, restoration of a broken relationship, a spouse to come to faith, he is asking to see Jesus. The words of a song come to mind: *“Turn your eyes upon Jesus; look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His wonder and grace.”* Face to face with Jesus, all that has mattered in our lives falls into His ordering, His weight of importance.

We have new breath with which to climb the hills that are put before us. We have new eyes to know the hearts of those who are put along side us. We have a new heart with walls of flesh through which the Holy Spirit can guide us.

We have hope. . .and His name is Jesus.

Let me be watchful, Lord, let me see You. . .

I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. Ps 27:13-14

We choose how we look at our lives. We choose where we place our hearts and where they remain.

I know so many people who watch the news as if it were the Gospel. Day after day they hear and see and read the details of struggles, infidelities, wars, hate crimes, political absurdities, and on and on. And so their hearts become wallpapered with the news of the world, but they are devoid of the life of the Gospel.

If we choose to be confident in what God says in His word, we really *can't* be moved. Not to say that the pain that others experience in this world won't touch our hearts; not to say that anger won't grow as we look at abuse and neglect. But we cannot be moved to unbelief. We cannot be moved to impotence. We *can* be moved to step forward in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And when we hope in that goodness, we see it. The atrocities do not disappear, but beyond them and before them we can see the tender working of the Father. And we can tell others. If we look for Jesus, we will see Him; when we see Him, our hearts will be moved. When our hearts are moved, we will tell others. And they, too, will begin to look for that life.

We are waiting for Jesus; we are certain that He has died, that He is risen, and that He will come again. So our waiting can be full of life, full of heart, and full of hope. *Thank you, loving Lord!*

Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place Ps 28:2

Even when we know He has heard us, we need to know it more deeply. Sometimes the anguish in our soul is so great, is so loud, that a calming assurance from a distance is not enough. We have turned and call to Him, and we need to know that He hears us.

So the psalmist writes: “*as I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place*”, and there we find the heart of the cry.

Imagine with me, a young child. She awakens in the night with dreams of terror and calls out for mercy. Almost before her breath is exhaled, she sees her Father coming into the room. And so she reaches up her hands, that he might reach down and pick her up.

Her gesture, her reaching up, displays utter confidence. She intuitively knows that this is the man who can pull her from the danger into a safe place.

And so is our heavenly Father for us. When there is terror, when there is a cry from our hearts for mercy, we already know, because we are calling Him, so the uplifting of our arms is a natural response from one who longs to be rescued.

Lord God, let us be with You enough so that our heart's response in times of trouble, in times of terror, is to call out and lift our arms to you. Thank you that you hear our cry before it ever crosses our lips.

Ascribe to the Lord, O mighty ones, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name; worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness. Psalm 29:1-2

It is worship that ascribes glory and worth. Our call as Christians is to step into his holiness, his presence, to worship. Worship takes us into his holiness, and that is where we are to remain—in glorious communion.

One would think that communion with God would be a final destination. In heaven it will be; one earth the competition is fierce! Thought out logically one would ask what could even begin to compete with God, but you and I both could produce lists and lists of things that compete for our heart's attention.

Often we fall to the competition because our encounters with God are few. Throughout the Old Testament He is telling the Israelites "*Remember*" and will then begin a litany of what He has done for them—how He has saved them. But remembering needs to not be a past thing but one that continues from then to now to the then to come. We need to be washed in the memory of God's amazing heart for his people.

We need one another in order to do that remembering. As one alone, the mind is quick to find the circumstances and park there. As more than one, there is more hope for finding the Father in the *now*, for drawing one another's attention, for standing in awe together on the holy ground.

*Lord Jesus, may our lives ascribe to you the glory due your name.
. .the name within which all beings find their life.*

The Lord gives strength to His people; the Lord blesses His people with peace. Ps 29:11

The strength is peace. *Jesus is our peace.* You, Father, bless us with Jesus.

We tend to think of strength as what empowers us to battle, when in truth it is the gift of being able to stand. Throughout scripture God calls us to be strong and courageous, to take our positions, to prepare our arms for battle. But then He tells us that the battle belongs to Him. So we are ready and we are focused, strengthened in the ways we need to be, so that we do not break under the pressure. And yet He is the One who goes before us; He stands alongside us; He comes after us.

All of our battles, the ones that are real, belong to the Lord. We must be prepared, but that preparation means a turning of our lives so that we look to Him. For in doing so we can hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit and move in confidence, in assurance, in strength and in peace.

Often people will look at Christians engaged in the battles of their lives, and what they will see is a curious certainty. It is baffling to those who do not know God, but for those of us who have been in or are in fights for our lives, that peace which passes all understanding is the signature that lets us know that it is his strength; it is his peace.

Thank you, Father, for that certainty. Let us live life in a way that holds out those hope for those who are outside of your tent.

You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever. Ps 30:11-12

That is the nature of our Father. He doesn't merely stop our wailing—He turns it into dancing; He doesn't merely remove our sackcloth—He clothes us then with joy. God is not a “get by” kind of God. He is the God of passion whose love for us brought His Son to earth, that we might be His own. It's a crazy, wonderful kind of love.

And if we don't let ourselves be totally overwhelmed by the craziness of it, by the awe of the magnitude, then our hearts will not even begin to sing.

This is not a member of a relay team handing you the baton so that you can run the next leg of the race—this is the coach, passing the baton to you, cheering you on, running along side you, clearing the path before you, and carrying you when your legs run out.

If our hearts are silent, then we've merely taken the baton and not looked back. And our lives will be grueling and our hearts so lonely.

No, let us have hearts that simply can't remain quiet. Let us begin to sing the praises of our Father—in our minds, with those in our homes, with the people He puts on our paths each day, with our enemies, with those who are broken, with those whose lives have been uprooted, with those who are dying.

That our praise may be like incense, an aroma of encouragement for our own hearts, an aroma of hope for those beyond, and an aroma of delight for our amazing, praiseworthy God.

I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul. You have not handed me over to the enemy but have set my feet in a spacious place. PS 31:7-8

When we have been lifted from the pit, there is no question who did the lifting and we, ever aware of our own inability to lift ourselves, find tears of awe that our Father would be so tender. And we are glad; and we rejoice.

We forget these “liftings” sometimes, although by taking time to remember we can sometimes lose breath at how close we might have come to the edge of God’s hand.

Again, not only does He rescue us, He doesn’t leave us there so perilously close to the “edge” but then sets us in a spacious place.

What is our spacious place? *Always being healed?* No. *Always having the problem disappear?* No. *Always the Lord?* Yes, and yes, and yes again.

How much we need to refocus our hearts, to just take long and wonderful looks at the heart of the One who created us, who sustains us. It is more than words; though we try. It is more than a call to “*check in*”—it is a call to remain. And it is a call to gather.

The love of the Father begs to be given away; the heart of the Father is open so wide, and if we really reside there, we will need to call out to others saying: “*Come, see!*”

Spaciousness for a Christian is both expansive and shielded. It is in the shelter of his wings. It is peace when our world is falling apart; it is hope when nothing makes sense.

May our hearts live in that spaciousness; the world so needs to see.