

Living from the Center

I grew up in “hurricane alley” on the gulf coast of Texas. Despite their ferocity, hurricanes have always fascinated me. Paradoxically, at the center of a hurricane’s force is a still, calm space. This “eye” defines it as a hurricane, rather than as just random winds, and helps to intensify and organize its power.

The redemptive power of the Christian life is certainly different from the destructive fury of a hurricane. And yet, the hurricane reminds us that the secret of Christians’ living as a sustained force for good in the world depends on maintaining an interior space for God. Then we become more than merely gusts of good intentions and breathless activity. We and our churches become a powerful force for God.

In *A Testament of Devotion*, Thomas Kelly writes of the sacred space at the center of our lives. He says that “deep within us all there is an amazing sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice.” This center calls us home to itself as we rediscover our destiny in God. When we yield ourselves to “these persuasions” and willingly commit ourselves to the “Light Within,” our true life begins.

Attending to the divine center is the secret of Jesus’ holy life and transforming power. Discover this secret for yourself. Make space for “holy” reading daily—either scripture or devotional material. Then pause for a few moments to make a place for God in the quietness of your heart; listen for an invitation from within; commit yourself wholly to God’s leading; let your time with God bring peace to your soul and shape your life in the world.

Stephen D. Bryant
Editor and Publisher

Faith

Read John 8:25-30

In thee, O LORD, do I hope.

—Psalm 38:15 (KJV)

Above the entrance to a tunnel in the Austrian Alps, these words, “In thee, O LORD, do I hope,” are written in the old Roman language. I read the words through the window of the car the moment before we started into the dark. To me they became a sermon that I never shall forget.

No mistake can be greater than the idea that Christians should be spared the tunnels in life and travel only in open places in radiant sunshine. On the contrary, experience shows that we will be tried as much as others, if not more.

The difference is not that Christians are spared the hardships of life. Here is the great difference: Christians can write on every tunnel in life those words: “In thee, O LORD, do I hope.” They never travel in the dark alone. Because of faith in Christ, Christians always have God’s Spirit in their heart and life. Christ lets us see, even in the darkness, glimpses of light opening into the world of light.

*Prayer: O God, we thank you that we need never be alone, for you are near. You enable us to meet darkness as well as light. In the name of Christ, who teaches us to believe in you and pray, “Our Father which art in heaven, . . . * Amen.”*

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Most important is not what happens to us but that we meet all things with faith in God.

Torbjörn Wikmark (Sweden)

**See page 19 for the full text of The Lord’s Prayer.*

God Is Our Refuge

Read Psalm 46

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

—Psalm 46:1

Two years ago, there was a great cyclone at Kandla port on the west coast of India. Thousands of people died. Many lost their loved ones; many more lost their houses.

One very poor Christian family was working in the port as laborers. They lived in a very small hut, but by the grace of God, the family members survived. Though they lost everything, God showed them that their lives are more precious than their possessions. They passed through difficult times, but God was with them and is with them still.

As we pass through difficult times, our situations and problems may be different. Our culture and lifestyles are different; we live in different parts of the world. But we have the same God, who is God of all people in every nation. And the Bible reminds us that God is our refuge and strength, that in whatever trouble we may find ourselves, God will see us through.

Prayer: Almighty and eternal God, we give you thanks that you are such a compassionate God. We pray for those who are passing through trials and difficulties. Lord, our God, assure them that you are with them. We ask in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I walk through death's valley,
God is with me.

Hemantkumar Parmar (Gujarat, India)

Safe Indeed

Read Psalm 121

I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come? My help comes from the LORD.

—Psalm 121:1-2

In 1984 I moved to Badingham, England, for two years. It was my first time away from home and family for any length of time. I had thought of myself as an independent adult, but I soon discovered how vulnerable and lost I could feel. I knew no one. I lived in a small village in a 150-year-old cottage with no telephone. The cottage was very cold with only a small, coal-burning heater in the living room. After two weeks with no contact with my family, I walked to a pay phone and called my parents. After tearful greetings and talking, I told them good-bye and started back to my cottage, feeling even more alone than before I had called.

I began praying, “God, no one in the world even knows where I am or how to get to me if I need them.” Suddenly I was struck with the absurdity of what I had said. “God, if you know where I am, I am safe indeed. Nothing else matters more than that.” That one simple yet all-encompassing reality carried me through the next two years and lifts me up still in times of need.

God knows where we are, and nothing matters more than that.

Prayer: Dear God, help us daily to enjoy family, friends, and the comforts of life without depending on them for our strength and happiness. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

No matter how far we roam, God goes with us.

Laura J. Blanton (Alabama)

Facing Goliath

Read 1 Samuel 17:37-47

Do not fear or be dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God's.

—2 Chronicles 20:15

When we remember the confrontation between David and the giant, Goliath, we generally think of David's bravery and skill. He aimed the stone with deadly accuracy. David, however, gave God the glory. David told Saul that God had delivered him from both the lion and the bear and that God would deliver him from Goliath (1 Samuel 17:37).

In 2 Chronicles 20:15, God spoke to Judah and Jerusalem and to Jehoshaphat, saying, "The battle is not yours but God's." That same truth sustained David when Israel faced Goliath and the Philistines.

What Goliath do you face? Perhaps you face the death of a loved one, a divorce, a secret sin, financial problems, wounds from childhood, or some other concern that looms like a giant before you. Like God's people in the Bible story, we may become frightened or dismayed because of a multitude of problems. Ultimately, the battle is not ours but God's.

The principle that the battle belongs to God has helped me in my Christian walk, especially when I have faced problems that were too big for my strength and wisdom. Knowing that the battle is God's means we can entrust the outcome to God's purposes.

Prayer: God, give us faith to do what we can and to trust you with the rest. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Where there is Christ, there is hope.

Mike Norcom (Mississippi, USA)

When All Is Lost

Read Matthew 27:45-50

I say to God, my rock, “Why have you forgotten me? Why must I walk about mournfully because the enemy oppresses me?”

—Psalm 42:9

Events in my life made me feel as if I had been abandoned by people and by God. Usually when people fail me, I turn to God. But for several years when I have felt broken in heart and mind, I have also felt as if God has abandoned me.

Then I read how Jesus was tested and what he overcame for our sake. Like me, Jesus felt abandoned by people and even by God the Father. That made me realize that Jesus Christ is in my wilderness experience with me. Even more remarkable is the fact that Jesus Christ chose to identify with us in the pain and loss of being human, when he could have remained in the bliss and joy of heaven.

My wilderness experience helped me to realize the truth of another statement, this one in Ephesians 4:10: “He fill(s) the whole universe.” I’m not totally out of my wilderness yet, but I cling to this promise: “God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day” (Ps. 46:5).

Prayer: Dear Loving God, thank you for being with us in our darkest experiences. Thank you for being with us even when we feel abandoned and alone. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When we face the wilderness, we can take comfort in knowing that Christ understands and is with us.

Sarah Chee (Singapore)

A Day of New Beginnings

Read Revelation 21:1-5

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

—2 Corinthians 5:17

A hymn titled “This Is a Day of New Beginnings” was sung in the church service the Sunday just before Don and I retired and moved from the community where we had lived for almost 40 years. As I listened, I realized that this was a message not only for the others in the congregation but also for us. It seemed more like a time of endings than a time of beginnings. Yet as I thought of it, I realized that God is the God of the new, of beginnings.

We were leaving our friends and our church. We were selling the house, leaving the wood-working shop, the beehive, our garden and flowers, our volunteer activities. Then it occurred to me that we come to new beginnings because some things have ended.

We are now living in a retirement community with others who have also given up much. Many have even experienced the loss of health and of spouse. For them as for us, there is the promise that God will make all things new. In our endings and in our beginnings, God is present, loving us and making our lives new.

Prayer: God of our new beginnings, help us to trust you. When there are endings for us, help us trust you to be with us and to show us new things. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When we walk with God, all things become new.

Mary Wineinger (Louisiana, USA)

God Weeps

Read Jeremiah 31:15-17

“A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

—Matthew 2:18 (NRSV)

I wake up in the morning to a deep sadness. My ears hear and my eyes see, but my mind cannot comprehend the destruction, the lives lost or disrupted. In places I do not know and may never visit, people are suffering, people are crying.

The words of the prophet Jeremiah quoted in Matthew 2:18 (above) apply today:

Voices are heard in the city and in the countryside.

*Voices are heard in shelters and hospitals and lonely places,
wailing and loud lamentation,*

*Mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, friends
and strangers weeping . . .*

They refused to be consoled, because their loved ones are no more.

What can I say? How can I respond? The grieving, devastated ones are people I may never meet; they live different lives; some follow other faiths. But they are my sisters and brothers. They are children of the Most High, the God who must be weeping too.

Prayer: God of Compassion, with you and all the world family, we weep and mourn. Comfort all who are alone or afraid, who wail in loud lamentation. Let us be your heart reaching out to those who grieve. Let us be your hands working to assist those who still live. For you are the God who stands with the least and the lost. Come by all the places that need your comforting and healing presence.

Beth A. Richardson (Tennessee, USA)

Hope in a Difficult Time

There is something deeper than trouble.

It is mercy.

God's amazing grace.

Carrying, lifting, holding us in all seasons.

There is something more powerful than despair.

It is mercy.

God's amazing love.

*Seeing us through dark nights, waves of sadness,
mountains of grief.*

There is something longer lasting than pain.

It is mercy.

God's healing touch.

*Bringing us hope, leading us to joy, teaching
us to sing.*

Larry J. Peacock (California, USA)

God of the darkness and the day,
It is so hard to wait
and to trust that you are present.
Sit with us in the darkness
help us to sleep
calm our anxiety
and bring us
to each new day
in hope.

Amen.

Thus says the LORD, . . . who created you,
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name,
you are mine.
When you pass through the waters
I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not
overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall
not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
. . . you are precious in my sight,
and honored, and I love you.

Isaiah 43:1-2, 4

Tender God,
who embraces us with love,
through the ages
you have told us,
“Fear Not.”
Whisper it again in our ears,
write it on our hearts.

Amen.

God heals the brokenhearted,
and binds up their wounds.
He determines the number of the stars;
he gives to all of them their names.
Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;
his understanding is beyond measure.
The LORD lifts up the downtrodden.

Psalm 147:3-6

You hold my right hand.
You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will receive me
with honor.
Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that
I desire other than you.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.

Psalm 73:23-26

God says:

“As a mother comforts her child,
so I will comfort you.”

Isaiah 66:13

Those who wait for the LORD shall renew
their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:31

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the
shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence
of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD
Forever.

(NKJV)

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth,
 as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
 as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
 and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Matthew 6:9-13 (KJV)

The LORD your God is with you,
he is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you,
he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing.

Zephaniah 3:17 (NIV)

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for
the morning,
more than those who watch for
the morning.

Psalm 130:5-6

An Anchor for the Soul

We have this hope, a sure
and steadfast anchor of the soul.

Hebrews 6:19a

Reflection:

What is your greatest source of hope?

In what areas of your life are you most in need of hope?

Hebrews speaks of hope as an “anchor of the soul.” Reflect on that image.

What other symbol or image would remind you of hope?

Draw or find a picture of that item, and hang it in a prominent place where you can see it and let it strengthen you.

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
“The LORD is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”

Lamentations 3:22-24

Peace I leave with you;
my peace I give to you.
I do not give to you as the world
gives. Do not let your hearts be
troubled, and do not let them
be afraid.

John 14:27

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted
within me?

Hope in God; for I shall again
praise him,
my help and my God.

Psalm 42:5-6a

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, 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 convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, 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 8:35, 37-39

I hereby command you:
Be strong and courageous; do not
be frightened or dismayed, for the
LORD your God is with you
wherever you go.

Joshua 1:9

For God alone my soul waits
in silence,
for my hope is from him.

Psalm 62:5

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Romans 12:10-12

In your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you.

1 Peter 3:15

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