

# Strengthened by Grace



*“It is Good for the Heart  
to be Strengthened by Grace for  
Hope, Healing and Wholeness”  
(Hebrews 13:9)*

**Patrick J. Griffiths**

# *"Strengthened by Grace"*

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## *An Introduction*

Grace is a relational truth. It is on the basis of grace that finite sinful humanity receives and then participates in the resources of God, resources that are made possible through the unlimited life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is because God is gracious that His Son works for us standing in the day of testing, our present life, and our future rest.

The book of Hebrews tells us that “it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace” (13:8). Peter exhorted his audience to “grow in grace” (2 Pet. 3:18). Paul likewise urged his audience “to continue in the grace of God” (Acts 13:43). He also wrote to his student Timothy to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:1). Somehow in ways we do not and perhaps cannot fully appreciate the grace of God has a sustaining quality for the people of God.

The intent of these nine short readings is to strengthen and nurture and urge and build up the reader in the grace of God. Their intent is to instill where lacking and to stir up where weak the hope, healing, and wholeness that can only be found in a correct understanding of who Jesus is, what He has done, and who His people are in Him.

So I invite you to come to the table that will never be empty; come to the well that will never be dry; eat fully and drink deeply. Jesus Christ is an inexhaustible resource. No matter what you do or how much you fail He is waiting for you to come. He is the one in whom all your hopes can be met, all your hurts mended and all your burdens banished. Do not wait any longer. Seek Him and in seeking Him you will find the sole satisfier of your heart’s longings.

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## *"Does God Care About Me?"*



*"Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death" (Matt. 27:1).*

Read Matthew 27:1-2

While reading Matthew's Gospel my attention was arrested by the following statement, "All the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death."

Here is what caused me to stop and consider, — *"an event is being voiced in time what had been determined from eternity."*

The impact of this foundational truth is enormous. Consider with me several verses.

- First, according to the Scripture our Lord's death is part of God's predetermined plan and foreknowledge (1 Pet. 1:18-20).

This is often referred to as "the eternal counsel of the Godhead." When the Godhead met in counsel one with another to determine and ordain all things outside of themselves, their plan included the incarnation of the Son and His death by crucifixion at the hands of wicked men (Acts 2:23).

- Second, as part of this predetermined plan, the prophets simply foretold what had already been determined (Acts 3:18).
- Third, this "mystery" was entrusted to the apostle Paul as a chief expounder (Eph. 3:8-11).

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He becomes the primary communicator of this mystery in time that had been determined in eternity past (Col. 1:25-27).

*Time is but an arena for the outworking of God's eternal purpose.*

Think about it. Matthew had stated this earlier in 26:24, "**The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him**; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."

Such truth does not negate human choice or responsibility this is equally clear, but it does tell me there is an ultimate designer who sees creation and its activities as the platform for displaying the wisdom, genius, grace, mercy, and power of who He is and what He has done and will do.

I am not here  
by chance  
and my life  
is not an accident.

Think about it. God's love for you reaches all the way back before He poured the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). My life and all of its varied expressions are a part of something bigger than I am. GOD LOVES ME. I am not here by chance and my life is not an accident.

Often we focus on what is good and neglect to note the sorrows of our life as being part of His plan. But think about it. When I read Matthew 27:1, I also read verses 30 and 44 and everything preceding, in between, and following. The New International Version translates verses 30 and 44 in this way, "Struck Him on the head again and again," and "Heaped insults on Him." When the Father sent His only begotten Son to be the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14) all of this was included, the magnitude of which we will never be able to fathom . . . never.

"He loves me  
and my life is  
part of His  
wisdom and  
grace."

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Does God care about you and me? Oh my friend, far more than either one of us can even begin to imagine. GOD LOVES YOU. The details of your life are the outworking of His eternal design. I can hardly understand it; it eludes my grasp, and escapes my ability to think, but . . . but this I know, “He loves me and my life is part of His wisdom and grace.”

Today as you think of His enormous wisdom, grace, and love, He not only sent His Son to be your Savior, but one day Jesus Christ will return to gather you unto Himself. Wow, what a day that will be. When life like a sea billow rolls over your soul remember this truth. It forms for us the bedrock of our hope . . . GOD LOVES US.

# 2

## "Hope"

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives,  
and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19).*

Read Luke 4:14-21

Kurt Cobain was the lead singer of the legendary grunge band *Nirvana*. He tragically took his own life in an act of suicide. Despite his widespread fame, great wealth and adulation as a rock star he grew terribly lonely and depressed. In the days leading up to his suicide one of his diary entries read: "Somebody, anybody, God help, help me please. I want to be accepted...I'm so tired of crying and dreaming, I'm soo soo alone." (Source: Charles Cross, *Heavier Than Heaven: A Biography of Kurt Cobain*. Reported in *Rolling Stone* magazine, November 2001)

It is impossible for some to appreciate the depth of despair that washes over individuals for a prolonged period of time that would drive them to take their own life. In such cases, there is no need for us to judge them; they have already judged themselves. Their self judgment produced a verdict of guilt and they sentenced themselves to death.

Almost all people everywhere have stress and are confronted with varying levels of discouragement. At times, these things can escalate to the point of driving people to despair and depression. We are sometimes under the false impression that once we believe in Christ, everything in the present will turn out alright and our life's circumstances will be better. Unfortunately, this is simply not true. If, however, this is not true, then what earthly difference does knowing Jesus Christ make?

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This is an honest question and it demands an honest answer. When Jesus Christ began His earthly ministry He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath in Nazareth where He had been brought up. He opened up the scroll and He read Isaiah 61:1.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19).

Consider what He said. Jesus Christ brings “good news” to the poor. He proclaims release to the captives. He brings recovery of sight to the blind. And He sets free those who are oppressed. Where on this list do you and I fall? Are we poor? Are we held in captivity? Are we blind? Are we oppressed? Absolutely! What then does Jesus Christ bring to me in this present life?

What Jesus Christ brings to me in this present life is hope! I am confident that in this life I will have tribulation but I am to take courage because Jesus Christ has overcome the world (John 16:33).

Jesus never promised to change my circumstances, but He has changed me and He has changed my destiny. Friend, this is hope with a capital "H." When the apostle Paul had been beaten with many blows, placed in chains, and thrown into a dark prison cell, he was able to raise up his voice and sing praises to God (Acts 16:22-25). And why was this possible? It was possible because of hope.

We must never forget that our present sufferings can never be compared with the glory that is awaiting us (Rom 8:18). Is it

Jesus never promised to change my circumstances, but He has changed me and He has changed my destiny.

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possible for us in the midst of our trying circumstances to stay the course, to hold fast, and not to despair? Absolutely! And how is such perseverance possible?

Listen carefully to Galatians 5:1, “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” Read this slowly and think on the grace in which you presently stand.

Think about what Paul has to tell us in 2 Timothy 4:9-18.

<sup>9</sup> Make every effort to come to me soon; <sup>10</sup> for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. <sup>11</sup> Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. <sup>12</sup> But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. <sup>13</sup> When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments. <sup>14</sup> Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. <sup>15</sup> Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching. <sup>16</sup> At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. <sup>17</sup> **But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me**, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. <sup>18</sup> The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (2 Tim. 4:9-18).

Even a casual reading allows us to hear in Paul's voice despair and victory, discouragement and triumph. How is this possible? It is possible because of hope.

Friend, we have hope, and His name is Jesus. Let me conclude with this story.

“As Vice President, George Bush represented the U.S. at the funeral of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. Bush was deeply moved by a silent protest carried out by Brezhnev's widow. She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, Brezhnev's wife performed an act of great courage and hope, a gesture that must surely rank as one of the most profound acts of civil disobedience ever committed: She reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest.

Friend,  
we have hope,  
and His name  
is Jesus.

There in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all hoped that her husband was wrong. She hoped that there was another life, and that that life was best represented by Jesus who died on the cross, and that the same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband.” (Gary Thomas, in *Christianity Today*, October 3, 1994, p. 26.)

To those who are perishing the word of the cross is foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. Let those who reject the cross mock us. Let us gladly accept the accusations of being simpletons and childish, but I for one will most assuredly die with hope rather than live with despair. We have all we need in Jesus Christ. May you find great comfort knowing Him.

# 3

## "Walking Through the Fields of Grace"

*"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28).*

Read Romans 8:26-39

On a regular basis, I receive questions from people within the congregation concerning things taught. I believe their questions are representative of a much larger group. Their question is simply voicing a desire to know more. Below is one of those questions. I trust you will find this short response profitable.

Dear Pastor Pat,

I have been struggling myself lately, which gives me opportunity to draw closer to the Lord as I am weaker and weaker. Good thing that **my weakness is my greatest strength**, because I have plenty of that! I know that this all increases my mercy and empathy for the hurting, but I am not enjoying it! Perhaps our dialogue can begin with **the chastening issue** — I know that is one issue which needs to be settled in my heart. I see "Whom the Lord loves, He chastens" and it stares me in the face. I know that I need to understand this in the light of His incredible love for me, and in the light of grace — but I am finding long-held emotions surface when difficulty comes and **I feel unloved by my Lord**. ("**If He could prevent this trouble — and He could — then why is He choosing not to?**") When I struggle emotionally, I have a "He's going to get me for this" reaction that I know is unbiblical but shows up anyway.

This is a key thing to resolve, and I want to! I have begun each day lately in Romans 8:26-39 and I know these things are true. However, they need to make their way to my heart of hearts.

### Answer

I have chosen to break your statement into four distinct areas. This will help me in answering the question.

**First**, “my weakness is my greatest strength.” I think all of us hate the “feeling” of vulnerability we have in being incompetent and susceptible to failure. I do not believe we can ever stray from the truth that our greatest strength is our weakness. It is only when I am weak that He is strong. If it could be any other way, we would never beg Him for His strength. We would boast of our ability to perform and we would live our lives completely robbed of His power (1 Cor. 1:25; 2 Cor. 11:30; 12:9; 13:4; Heb. 11:34).

Never stop resting in the finished work. He is enough.
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Allow these verses to wash over you. We glory in our weakness. I cry out with you in desperation. God MUST work, or we perish. This is where He wants us to exist and abide. God wants us weak. Perhaps this is why we do not always get the deliverance from our annoying habits of weakness. We think in their absence God would be better displayed. Yet in His wisdom and grace, He has designed the annoyance to persist. God’s wisdom says, “He will always use the best means to accomplish the highest end of glorifying Himself.” The best means might be the weight that so easily overtakes me. I exhort you, not as a superior to an inferior, but as one, who is weak in the knee and blurred in vision. Never stop resting in the finished work. He is enough. In the penning of these words, a smile crosses my face, G-L-O-R-Y friend . . . GLORY.

**Second**, “the chastening issue.” It persists. Some things will linger as long as our flesh abides. I believe this is a “half-truth” robbing Christ of His glory. Grace reigns because the cross still stands.

I do not have all the answers (or even a small smattering of them), but I do know that if you wish to live by grace, you must answer the questions.

God does chasten His children. However, I do believe that divine chastening is providential or natural. It is not supernatural or miraculous as in the case of Ananias, with his wife Sapphira (Acts 5) or Herod (Acts 12).

Because God controls all of life, I cannot absent Him from life’s inherent problems. We have found “chastening” to be impregnated with presuppositional bias. It is almost impossible to separate one’s presuppositions from the word. Regardless as to how it is defined, most will attach to the word some idea of punishment for sin. I find this theologically errant. I would probably use a different word than chastening.

Thus, regardless as to whom you are, saved or unsaved, if you sin there are providential consequences to that sin. Is there a divine judgment against sin? Absolutely. For the believer it took place at Calvary in full. For the unbeliever, there awaits a fearful sentence against sin at the Great White Throne.

How can one come to any other conclusion than the above thought after viewing the power of Romans 8:28-39? The point of the passage is that no one, not even God, will be against us. No charge will ever be brought against God’s elect.

If the chastening of God is more than this, then I do not know how we could ever possibly know. Does my sin grieve Him? Absolutely.



Such is true for believers and unbelievers alike. However, in the case of the believer God will never credit it to my account or treat me differently because of it.

**Third**, “I feel unloved by my Lord.” One of the greatest errors I counsel against is the bondage-forming pattern of “I just do not *feel* it.” Please understand, I would never scold anyone. One’s feelings are real and valid, but a horrible means of living the grace life. Feelings cannot form the bedrock for living. I feel many things (and nine out of ten times what I feel is not good). I cannot live my life based on my feelings. I must base my life on what I think and believe. Do my circumstances matter? Are the burdens I bear and the sorrow I feel real? Absolutely, but there is a deeper bedrock truth that interprets my circumstances and thus my feelings. It is this, “God reigns over all the details of life.” Nothing falls outside of His wise, merciful, compassionate, and grace filled person. Everything in life is the outworking of His will. Embrace it and you will sing and dance. Resist it and you will perish.

Feelings cannot form the bedrock for living.
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I do understand the nature of our personalities and temperaments, however, truth is not formed by what I feel. Truth is true regardless as to how it is interpreted by me or manifested through me.

**Fourth**, "If He could prevent this trouble -- and He could -- then why is He choosing not to?" The trouble drives me to my knees. I surrender all that I am at His throne. I have nothing to offer. I come as a pauper clinging tenaciously to Him. In the midst of it, I plead for grace. After it, I thank Him for the trouble (Eph. 4; 1 Thess. 5). A unique “bird” can sing like Paul and Silas in Acts 16 or hold the course like Job. His grace is sufficient (2 Cor. 12:9) and He will with the trouble provide the way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13).

**Finally**, do not resist the failure. Embrace it (Gen. 50:19, 20). All of our confused existence is part of His wise and merciful master plan. It is when we embrace this, that we will find our rest. I know this is “insane,” but it is the way of the cross. Grace reigns because the cross still stands. **May your heart sing as you meditate on Him.** Remember, as you have often reminded me of, “Positional truth is His gift to me.” The gift, however, must never take the place of the giver. Amen.

All of our confused existence is part of  
His wise and merciful master plan.  
It is when we embrace this,  
that we will find our rest.

# "When Life Is Out Of Control"

# 4

*"He caused the storm to be still,  
So that the waves of the sea were hushed" (Ps. 107:29).*

Read Psalm 107

Have you ever felt as if you have no control over your life? It is the kind of feeling you get that wakes you up in the middle of the night and refuses to let you sleep. The emotion you experience is probably the same as one whose parachute is not opening even though every possible cord is pulled. Regardless as to what you might think and what others might tell you, the "feeling" you have is less than ideal and your emotional stability is shot. When we find ourselves sucked into the vortex of the storm, what are we to do?

Why is God allowing us to experience a life out of control? I believe there are at least four reasons why such times visit our lives.

- **First**, trials come to assure us that we are not in control (James 4:13, 14).

<sup>13</sup> "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' <sup>14</sup> Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away" (James 4:13, 14).

Because of depravity, we have this incredible capacity for unbridled arrogance. For whatever reason, we actually believe the humanistic reports concerning our development and future. Whenever we think we have "our act together," God has a way of showing us just how fragile the best-laid plans are.

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- **Second**, trials come to show us what is important (Acts 27:19).

“and on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands” (Acts 27:19).

When Paul found himself in the midst of the storm, nothing mattered but life. Sometimes the storms help us to see what matters most. Storms have the power of removing the dross from our lives. People always take precedence over possessions.

- **Third**, trials come to magnify the sustaining grace of God (2 Cor. 12:9).

“And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness’” (2 Cor. 12:9a).

In the midst of our most difficult and sustained trial, God is ministering to us. Your perseverance in the storm is a testimony to God’s relentless grace.

- **Finally**, trials come to declare the supremacy of God in all things (Job 40:6-9).

“Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm and said, Now gird up your loins like a man; I will ask you, and you instruct Me. Will you really annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified? Or do you have an arm like God, And can you thunder with a voice like His?” (Job 40:6-9).

No event happens that He has not ordered. Regardless as to how “nasty” the event might be, God has so ordered providence so that you find yourself in the midst of His will. This is what lends meaning to the most horrific act and smallest detail. All things are rushing

toward the ultimate goal of God being glorified (Phil. 2:10, 11; Rom. 11:36).

In the midst of our sorrow, this can be a difficult pill to swallow. What is the alternative? You and I are not victims of fate or evil men. We are part of His loving and wise purpose. Friend, we are not in control, God is.

My heart grieves for those whose situations and circumstances are less than ideal. To see one drowning in the sea of emotional upheaval is heart wrenching. You reach out and grab them with all your might, you make every effort to pray and to love, but in the midst of the storm, let us not abandon the boat of our theology. Let us “Look unto Jesus the author **and finisher of our faith.**” Friend, do not let go. Hold fast to sound words for grace and peace. You are loved.

You and I are not  
victims of fate  
or evil men.  
We are part of  
His loving and  
wise purpose.

# 5

## *"When Winter Comes"*

*"As the deer pants for the water brooks,  
So my soul pants for You, O God.  
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God;  
When shall I come and appear before God?  
My tears have been my food day and night,  
While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" (Ps. 42:1-3)*

Read Psalm 42

Every believer has gone through periods when they simply do not have the motivation to read their Bible, pray, or even want to attend church.

For those of us in the Midwest we are very much accustomed to the four seasons of the year. Winter is that season of the year where everything lies dormant and appears dead and unyielding. The two bookends to winter's tenure are the seasons of transitions; fall and spring. Fall leads us into winter and spring leads us out of winter. Summer is somewhat enigmatic. Because of our present schooling year, summer becomes a time of family vacations, cookouts and visitation.

I enjoy the seasons. Each one makes me glad for the other three. In the summer I look forward to winter and in the winter I look forward to the summer. One of the tremendous beauties in our seasons is the changing of the leaves. We have come to appreciate the colorful Maple tree. The Maple leaf turns bright red and yellow and ignites the entire landscape with its transitory beauty. Within a few short weeks all of its leaves will fall away and it will stand as a naked sentinel over the snow covered ground. Its life seems all but gone. Nothing appears to move from either within or without. Yet soon enough spring happens and new life is brought forth.

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It is at the end of the winter season and before full spring that the Maple tree yields its sugary treasure of Maple syrup.

The Christian life is very much like the Maple tree and its seasonal life cycle. All of us have a fall where our leaves begin to drop off and we enter a period of time that appears to be barren and unfruitful. The winter months of life are often preceded by a brilliant display of activity. Yet how are we to understand our winter seasons? Winter can be a time of tremendous dryness. Our skin cracks and flacks and moisture is crucial during this period of time. We become depressed and we struggle against this season of the year.

When I find myself struggling spiritually and/or emotionally drained, how am I to find comfort and rest? The issue for me is making sure I understand what is happening in my life from the perspective of God and not that of my circumstances or feelings.

I do not think many of us actually consider how we view life. If God is not in control, and in some sense each individual is, then one's worldview is best represented by a pane of glass that has shattered and splintered into a million unconnected pieces.

If God is in control, then life is to be viewed as a mosaic or multi-pieced puzzle that has a singular over-arching picture comprised of a million distinct though connected parts. The season we call winter is an intentional and connected part of God's singular over-arching picture. If for no other reason, winter makes us appreciate the other three seasons of life.

The season we call winter is an intentional and connected part of God's singular over-arching picture.

Should you find yourself in a winter season, let me suggest four thoughts. First, be still which implies slowing down. Second, stop trying to figure out how to resolve the problem. Most of the time

where you find yourself is bigger than you. Third, trust God to be God. And finally, rest in His control.



*"Nor Do We Know What To Do,  
But Our Eyes Are On You"*

G

*"O our God, will You not judge them?"*

*For we are powerless before this great multitude who are coming against us;  
nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on You" (2 Chron. 20:12).*

Read 2 Chronicles 20:1-29

What an incredible statement, "Nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on You." Our eyes, O LORD, are on you. We sit at the end of ourselves, cliff bound, desperate, helpless, and without physical hope, but . . . but our eyes are on You.

King Jehoshaphat of Judah sits surrounded by the Moabites and the Ammonites with some of the Meunites (20:1). They are described as a vast army (20:2). Their presence was significant enough and the outcome certain that a fast is proclaimed for all of Judah and the people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD (20:3). Israel found herself in a do-or-die conflict. Yet their doing was to invite the dying. Instead of "wasting" their efforts through self-help activity, they focused their energy in a passionate plea through prayer and fasting to the God of Judah — their God, the God of the covenant, the God whose promises never fail, the God with whom they had covenanted themselves.

It was not a  
hopeless situation  
for their hope  
was in God.

There were no options or fall back plans; there was only one way out. God must help or all would be lost. They were a desperate people. It was not a hopeless situation for their hope was in God, but would He come to their aid?

Have you ever been desperate? Have you ever been at the end of

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yourself where there was nothing left but God? Everything shouted “hopeless.” Your agitation was so great and significant that it interrupted your “life” and erupted into swings of volatility and instability; where rational thought ceased and insanity called in clear voices that resonated within your fevered mind.

In the midst of this internal madness and mass hysteria came the piercing call to rush to the God who is. We try everything else first, and then . . . and then we stop dead in our tracks exhausted from our agitated activity to seek Him who alone is able.

It is then that we come empty. We utter the words of the broken heart, “O God, we do not know what to do.” That which is our last hope, that which should have been our first call looms before us. “O God, we do not know what to do, but . . . BUT our eyes are upon you.”

In a flash God becomes our immediate reality. His majestic transcendence puts the problems of my life into their proper perspective. He is God and all things swirling around me, good or bad, are the outworking of His eternal purpose. He controls who succeeds and who fails. He is the one who determines the marching of our armies and the success of our campaigns.

“O God, we do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.” Upon you, O God, our hope is fixed. Upon you, O God, do we now come.

O God, forgive me for my stupidity. Forgive me for my lack of trust, belief, and hope in you. Forgive me for placing my confidence in my own ability to save. How stupid can I be? Why would I go elsewhere? What was I thinking? Fortunately for me, God already forgave. God is never surprised or shocked by my inability to believe. God is always waiting for us to come to the end of ourselves. He is

“Our greatest strength is our weakness and our only boast is His cross.”

waiting for us to fully recognize that “our greatest strength is our weakness and our only boast is His cross.”

In 2001 Evan Smailes wrote the song, “The Lighthouse.” The lyrics behind the song capture well the idea presented in our passage. Read carefully the words. He states well the idea, “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.”

The Lighthouse  
Written by Evan Smailes

When darkness falls all around  
When the waves rise up against my soul  
Straining just to see through the storm  
Searching for the way that leads me home

You are the lighthouse that beckons me  
You are the power that strengthens me  
You are the fullness of deity  
You are Jesus my God

When I'm overwhelmed with my fears  
When the doubts rise up within my soul  
I will lift my eyes to the hope  
To the saving light that leads me home

You are the lighthouse that beckons me  
You are the power that strengthens me  
You are the fullness of deity  
You are Jesus my God

© 2001 Vineyard Songs (Canada) CCLI# 1596342  
Album: All I Need/Vineyard

May it please the Father to bring us to the end of ourselves so that with the nation of Judah we might once more cry out to God with, “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.”

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# 7

## *"If a Calamity Occurs in a City Has Not the Lord Done It?"*

*"If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble?  
If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?"*

*(Amos 3:6)*

Read Amos 3:6

Amos clearly shows how the activities of life have behind them divine initiative. God is not a mere spectator to that which He has created. God is intimately involved in the affairs of His creation. He moves wind and sun, moon and snow to carry out the desires of His eternal purpose.

Once more we revisit the idea that calamity is divinely sourced. I still struggle with the idea that if God is not the cause either directly or through secondary causation, then who is? Can anyone make sense of hardship, heartache, and distress if God is somehow absent from it? I have been visited by too much anguish to want it to be random and unintentional. I have been at too many funerals and sat alongside of the hurting too many times to make sense of it apart from God.

The paintbrush of God sweeps wide on the canvass of His own creation with bold and dramatic strokes. Lightning and thunder, tidal wave and tornado, wait upon His very word to unfold their fury. Those who find themselves swept away in an avalanche of tears seek to make sense of no sense. They want to see behind their veil of tears, what hand moves the storm, whose will has bent the branches of destruction to touch the seemingly innocent.

I no longer seek to understand or appreciate what happens, how it happens, and why it happens. Now I know it simply happens and

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somehow in the mystery behind it all sits a God whose wisdom exceeds mine, whose strength swallows up my weakness, and whose gracious kindness sustains me in my despair.

Life is filled with sorrow and burden bearing. Some of our conditions are chronic and without any immediate or visible relief. What are we to make of our calamities?

In the midst of my  
brokenness and despair  
I am to be comforted in  
knowing that God's  
dealings with me  
although calamitous  
are sourced in His  
unconditional love  
for me.

The Lord has done it. The . . . Lord . . . has . . . done . . . it. We must allow those words to soak into our minds. This is not a debate around theology, but the very fiber and fabric of our lives. How do we understand and live under the black clouds that visit our lives? What can we say to those who are struggling against the tides of destruction? How do we intervene?

We are neither smart enough nor strong enough to lift our own demons let alone the demons of others. Our answer to those who seek relief from the seeds of doubt that have planted themselves into our minds is to say like Amos of old, "If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?"

God has established with His people a covenant of love. He has promised us unconditional love. A love so immense and lavish that no one can fathom the height, breadth, width, or depth of it. Thus in the midst of my brokenness and despair I am to be comforted in knowing that God's dealings with me although calamitous are sourced in His unconditional love for me.

He is not out to destroy me. He is not trying to make my life miserable. His actions toward me are meant to show me the richness of Christ in the midst of my heartache and consuming stress. I am not

a victim of my choices or the choices of others. I live in light of such choices and brace myself against the consequences of living in a sinful world. But it is a world under the direct and immediate watch-care of Almighty God.

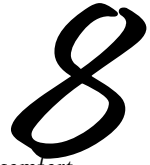
He is not asleep. He is governing each moment of every day.

Because this is true I can embrace the idea that when calamity visits a city God is doing His work. This is not only true for the city but also for its inhabitants. Our God is behind natural disaster and He is behind the consequences of sinful man. I cannot doubt His presence lest I live in His absence and such a prospect is inconceivable.

May we find comfort knowing that in the middle of our heartache God has not abandoned us. He is right there cradling us in the crook of His Merciful arm.

## *"Ministers of Healing"*

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Father of mercies and God of all comfort;  
who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort  
with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor 1:3-4).*



Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-11

As with September 11, 2001 so also August 29, 2005, physical, economical, and emotional desolation visited our land. For many it had a strong spiritual dimension as well. All was lost except the clothes on their back and the change in their pockets. To see such gloom is heart wrenching. We would wish it on no one. From this destruction many will sow seeds of hope. Often when all is lost, God is found.

Often when all is lost,  
God is found.

Have you ever looked into the eyes of despair? Have you ever seen hopelessness? Have you ever touched the shell of what was once an animated life where “the lights are on, but no one is home?” Have you ever hugged someone who had nothing to hold them up but your embrace? As the pastor of a local fellowship, I have.

It is difficult for us to imagine the degree of loss experienced by those in New York City on September 11, 2001 and New Orleans, Louisiana on August 29, 2005 and although those living in Milwaukee, Wisconsin are approximately 890 miles from New York City, New York and 1030 miles from New Orleans, Louisiana, we still have, in our fellowship, those whose lives have been reduced to rubble by Hurricane type forces and who live with the constant threat of sin’s terrorist attacks. Their lives are relentlessly bombarded by uneasiness, uncertainty, and undoing.

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To sit in the presence of one who is broken, who is on the brink of the unknown, whose very life-blood is draining from them emotionally and spiritually is humbling. There is little to say. Words are unnecessary and often unwanted. No one is smart enough, strong enough, or wise enough to comfort those who are being called by brokenness.

All we can do is listen . . . just listen. To love without condition, to accept without requirement, to forgive without limit, and to serve without reward, that is all . . . and often that is enough.

Those who are broken do not need our judgment or condemnation. They do not need our rejection or rebuff. They simply need someone to give them an ear, to embrace them warmly and to stand with them during their time of visitation.

It is proper and right for us to be moved by the pain of our nation, but let us not be so narrow as to lose sight of the multitudes within our own fellowship and immediate community who live silent lives of despair. Let us beg God to make us a fellowship where hope, healing, and wholeness wait to be administered.

May God enable us to fling wide our embrace. May He see fit to make us a fellowship, yea, a community of comforters. To be such a place is to receive a stewardship, a trust from God. It begins with one person, then persons, then a group, and finally a fellowship. Oh may God enable us to drink deeply from the pain of others in order that we might be able to minister to the hurting. Friend, let us not hold at bay the crushed. Let us not forget that although distance has protected us from having a direct hit as it relates to natural calamity, we are still surrounded by a fellowship of the hurting. Today may it please God to make us ministers of healing to the hurting.



# *"Will Not Heaven Be A Wonderful Place?"*

# 9

*"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes;  
and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning,  
or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4).*

Read Revelation 21:1-7

Will not heaven be a wonderful place? Will it not be wonderful to finally and fully rest? In that day, there will be no more heartache, no more burden bearing, no more sorrow, no more mask wearing, no more misunderstandings, no more moral failure, no more gossip, no more side taking, no more lusts of the flesh, no more greed, no more jealousy, no more intolerance, no more division, no more financial preoccupation, no more cliques, no more hatred, no more ego stroking, no more politically-correct jargon, no more battles, no more scars, no more emotional strain, no more spiritual unbelief . . . no more.

My computer sites the preceding sentence as "wordy" and identifies it as a "long sentence." It encourages me to "consider revising." Friend, the sentence does not begin to scratch the surface of, "In that day."

Today, however, we do battle with our flesh, our old man, our old self (Col. 3:5). Today, we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, and against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:12). Today, we stand like Peter, vowing our undying loyalty only to betray Him when we find ourselves between a rock and a hard place (John 13:36-38). Today, we can taste the emptiness of our love for Him. Today, we can hear that inner voice of doubt that creeps into our positive affirmations. Today, we stumble, we fall, and we fail. Today . . .

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However, in that day we will see Him, and we will be like Him for we will see Him as He is (1 John 3:1, 2). In that day, we will see Him in His radiant beauty. In that day, we will see the power of His unsheathed glory as He receives us as one of His own. In that day, we will hear the soothing melodious sound of His voice upon our ears saying, “Welcome home.” In that day, we will feel the comfort and warmth of His unconditional embrace as He says, “My son.” In that day, we will taste the thirst quenching and hunger crushing pleasure of who He is. In that day, all that we are will explode with unbridled joy in creaturely worship of Him who alone is worthy. In that day . . .

It is this hope that penetrates the present. It is this hope that sustains, that nourishes, and that encourages. Today let us believe in that day. It is the hope of “that day” that brings rest in “this day.”

**“In that day,” my fellow pilgrim, there will be less of you and more of Him . . . Will not heaven be a wonderful place?**

It is the hope of “that day” that brings rest in “this day.”
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## *A Final Word*

Well . . . what did you find? Are the tattered edges of past failures feeling the mending hands of Jesus caress carefully against them?

Friend, do not lose hope. No matter how black the night Jesus stands as a steady beacon guiding the wayfarer into the port of His resting place.

Think about it; if not Him, then whom . . . if not now, then when . . . and if not this, then what? Whatever promises others might make they are but vapors of temporal nothingness. They are “clouds without water . . . autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, [and] uprooted” (Jude 12). Jesus Christ is the friend’s shoulder, the companion on the road. He is the guiding light in the darkness of lost nights. He is the soothing voice calming the fears of failed endeavors. He is the security of the supporting hand. He has been this to countless millions, He *is* this to untold multitudes, and He will be this for you.

He is eagerly seeking you out. Open yourself to Him. Let these short writings be the first step. Do not stop. Keep going. Go back to them as often as you need until . . . truth begins to sink in. He is there and when you come you will find that He is enough in this life and in the life to come.



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