

DAILY DEVOTIONS

Monday, March 22 – Fear From Our Storms

Jesus said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

Mark 4:40

In a TV commercial I saw recently, a woman casually asks someone in a group watching TV, “What are you searching for, Mark?” “A version of myself that doesn’t make decisions based on fear,” he responds soberly—not realizing that she was just asking what he liked to watch on TV!

Whoa, I thought. I wasn’t expecting a TV commercial to hit me so profoundly! But I related to poor Mark: I too feel embarrassed by the way fear sometimes seems to direct my life.

Jesus’ disciples also experienced the profound power of fear. Once, as they headed across the Sea of Galilee (Mark 4:35), “a furious squall came up” (v. 37). Terror gripped them, and they suggested that Jesus (who’d been sleeping!) might not care about them: “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” (v. 38).

Fear distorted the disciples’ vision, blinding them to Jesus’ good intentions for them. After He rebuked the wind and waves (v. 39), Christ confronted the disciples with two penetrating questions: “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” (v. 40).

Storms rage in our lives as well, don’t they? But Jesus’ questions can help us put our fears in perspective. His first question invites us to name our fears. The second invites us to entrust those distorted feelings to Him—asking Him for eyes to see how He guides us even through life’s most raging storms.

PRAYER:

Loving Savior, thank You that You’re always present in the storm. As I move through life’s scary moments, help me each day to talk to You and entrust You with my fears. Amen.

Tuesday, March 23 – Caring Letters

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession.
1 Peter 2:9

Many years ago, Dr. Jerry Motto discovered the power of a “*caring letter*.” His research found that simply sending a letter expressing care to discharged patients who had previously attempted suicide reduced the rate of recurrence by more than half. Recently, health care providers have rediscovered this power when sending “caring” texts, postcards, and even social media memes as follow-up treatment for the severely depressed.

Twenty-one “books” in the Bible are actually letters—epistles—caringly written to first-century believers who struggled for a variety of reasons. Paul, James, and John wrote letters to explain the basics of faith and worship, and how to resolve conflict and build unity.

Peter, however, specifically wrote to believers who were being persecuted by the Roman emperor, Nero. Peter reminded them of their essential value to God, describing them this way in 1 Peter 2:9, “*You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession.*” This lifted their gaze to God's great purpose for them in their world: “*that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*”

Our great God Himself wrote a book filled with caring letters to us—inspired Scripture; that we might always have a record of the value He assigns us as His own. I encourage us to read His letters daily and share them with others who need the hope Jesus offers.

PRAYER:

Father, may we know you more intimately as we read the “letters” You have written to us in Holy Scriptures. Not only do we desire just to read them but apply them to our lives daily effecting those who are around us daily. Amen.

Wednesday, March 24 – A Strong Heart

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. *Psalm 73:26*

In his book *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, co-authored with Philip Yancey, Dr. Paul Brand observed, “A hummingbird heart weighs a fraction of an ounce and beats eight hundred times a minute; a blue whale’s heart weighs half a ton, beats only ten times per minute, and can be heard two miles away. In contrast to either, the human heart seems dully functional, yet it does its job, beating 100,000 times a day [65-70 times a minute] with no time off for rest, to get most of us through seventy years or more.”

The amazing heart so thoroughly powers us through life that it has become a metaphor for our overall inner well-being. Yet, both our literal and metaphorical hearts are prone to failure. What can we do?

The psalmist Asaph, a worship leader of Israel, acknowledged in Psalm 73 that true strength comes from somewhere--Someone--else. He wrote, “*My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever*” (v. 26). Asaph was right. The living God is our ultimate and eternal strength. As the Maker of heaven and earth, He knows no such limitations to His perfect power.

In our times of difficulty and challenge, may we discover what Asaph learned through his own struggles: God is the true strength of our hearts. We can rest in that strength every day.

PRAYER:

Father, I thank You that when I'm weak, You're strong. That when I'm overwhelmed, You're enough. That when I'm confused, You have perfect clarity.

Thursday, March 25 – Jesus In Me

God has chosen to make known . . . the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. *Colossians 1:27*

During an episode of the popular US television talent competition *America's Got Talent*, a five-year-old girl sang with such exuberance that a judge compared her to a famous child singer and dancer in the 1930s. He remarked, "I think Shirley Temple is living somewhere inside of you." Her unexpected response: "Not Shirley Temple. Jesus!"

I marveled at the young girl's deep awareness that her joy came from Jesus living in her. Scripture assures us of the amazing reality that all who trust in Him not only receive the promise of eternal life with God but also Jesus' presence living in them through His Spirit—our hearts become Jesus' home (Colossians 1:27; Ephesians 3:17).

Jesus' presence in our hearts fills us with countless reasons for gratitude (Colossians 2:6-7). He brings the ability to live with purpose and energy (1:28-29). He cultivates joy in our hearts in the midst of all circumstances, in both times of celebration and times of struggle (Philippians 4:12-13). Christ's Spirit provides hope to our hearts that God is working all things together for good, even when we can't see it (Romans 8:28). And the Spirit gives a peace that persists regardless of the chaos swirling around us (Colossians 3:15).

With the confidence that comes from Jesus living in our hearts, we can allow His presence to shine through so that others can't help but notice.

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for making my heart Your home. Please help my life to reflect that Your presence resides in me daily. Amen.

Friday, March 26 – Small But Mighty

We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.

Ephesians 2:10

There are times late at night in North America's harsh Sonoran Desert where one can hear a faint, high-pitched howl. But you probably wouldn't suspect the source of the sound—the small yet mighty grasshopper mouse, howling at the moon to establish its territory.

This unique rodent known as the “werewolf mouse”, is also carnivorous. In fact, it preys on creatures few would dare mess with, such as the scorpion. But the werewolf mouse is uniquely equipped for that particular battle. It not only has a resistance to scorpion venom but can even convert the toxins into a painkiller!

There's something inspiring about the way this resilient little mouse seems custom-made to survive and even thrive in its harsh environment. As Paul explains in Ephesians 2:10, that kind of marvelous craftsmanship characterizes God's designs for His people as well. Each of us is “*God's handiwork*” in Jesus, uniquely equipped to contribute to His kingdom. No matter how God has gifted you, you have much to offer. As you embrace with confidence who He's made you to be, you'll be a living witness to the hope and joy of life in Him.

So as you face whatever feels most challenging in your own life, take courage. You may feel small, but through the gifting and empowerment of Holy Spirit, God can use you to do mighty things

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for the incredible way You've designed me to live with joy and purpose. Help me to believe, and find courage in, the truth of who I am in You. Amen.

Saturday, March 27 – The Burden of Wrongs

“Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult”

1 Peter 3:9

On January 30, 2018, almost thirty-eight years after his conviction, Malcolm Alexander walked out of prison a free man. DNA evidence cleared Alexander, who had steadfastly maintained his innocence amid a myriad of court proceedings that were tragically unjust. An incompetent defense attorney (who was later disbarred), shoddy evidence, and dubious investigative tactics all put an innocent man in prison for nearly four decades. When he was finally released, however, Alexander showed immense grace. “You cannot be angry,” he said. “There’s not enough time to be angry.”

Alexander’s words evidence a deep grace. If injustice robbed us of thirty-eight years of our lives and destroyed our reputations, we would likely be angry, furious. Though Alexander spent many long, heartbreaking years bearing the burden of wrongs inflicted upon him, he wasn’t undone by the evil. Rather than exerting his energy trying to get revenge, he exhibited the posture Peter instructs: *“Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult”* (1 Peter 3:9).

The Scriptures go a step further: rather than seeking vengeance, Peter tells us we are to bless (v. 9). We extend forgiveness, the hope of well-being, for those who have unjustly wronged us. Without excusing their evil actions, we can meet them with God’s scandalous mercy. On the cross, Jesus bore the **burden of our wrongs**, that we might receive grace and extend it to others—even those who have wronged us.

PRAYER:

Father, it’s hard not to want those who hurt me to hurt just as much. Help me to live out Your mercy and grace. Jesus you demonstrated on the cross the ultimate example of love and forgiveness that shows us that we too must forgive. Amen.

Sunday, March 28 – Surrounded By God

As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people both now and for evermore.

Psalm 125:2

In a busy airport, a young mother struggled alone. Her toddler was in full tantrum mode—screaming, kicking, and refusing to board their plane. Overwhelmed and heavily pregnant, the burdened young mother finally gave up, sinking to the floor in frustration, covering her face, and starting to sob.

Suddenly six or seven women travelers, all strangers, formed a circle around the young mother and her child—sharing snacks, water, gentle hugs, and even a nursery song. Their loving circle calmed the mother and child, who then boarded their plane. The other women returned to their seats, not needing to discuss what they had done, but knowing their support had strengthened a young mother exactly when she needed it.

This illustrates a beautiful truth from Psalm 125. “*As the mountains surround Jerusalem,*” says verse 2, “*so the Lord surrounds his people.*” The image reminds us how the bustling city of Jerusalem is, indeed, flanked by surrounding hills—among them the Mount of Olives, Mount Zion, and Mount Moriah.

In this same way, God surrounds His people—supporting and standing guard over our souls “*both now and for evermore.*” Thus, on tough days, look up, “*unto the hills,*” as the psalmist puts it (Psalm 121:1). God awaits with strong help, steady hope, and everlasting love.

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for surrounding us when our days do not go so well. When we feel like there is no use and find ourselves “sitting” in the middle of our troubles, You surround us with the presence of Holy Angels to bring us comfort. We are grateful for Your love and care. Amen.