

# W ilderness W ords

SOME DAILY DEVOTIONALS  
FROM PASTORS OF THE WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA CONFERENCE  
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
SERVING IN THE MIDST OF COVID-19

**THANK YOU:**

To all the pastors  
who contributed to this collection  
of daily devotionals,  
and ultimately,  
to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,  
in whose Name we are called to serve.

**HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET:**

Each day you will find a scripture reading at the top of the page,  
it is recommended that you read that scripture first  
and meditate on it for about three minutes.

Then, read it a second time, silently if you wish,  
and continue to read the devotional/reflection for that scripture.

There is also a prayer that it is included for you,  
feel free to also pray this silently or aloud,  
no matter where you may be.

That's it!

---

*We pray that these devotionals will help you in these unsettling times,  
that they will bring comfort,  
that they will inspire,  
that they will allow you to feel God's presence.*

*God Bless you!*

*-Bay Allen (EDITOR)*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>4 Psalm 4:8</b>	<b>Bay Allen</b>	FAITH COMMUNITY UMC / RIVERVIEW UMC
<b>5 Matthew 14:13-21</b>	<b>Pastor Tim Goodman</b>	BEAVER UMC
<b>6 Deuteronomy 31:8</b>	<b>Bay Allen</b>	FAITH COMMUNITY UMC / RIVERVIEW UMC
<b>7 Joshua 1:9</b>	<b>Hae Seon Lee</b>	PROVISIONAL ELDER, ERIE-MEADVILLE DISTRICT
<b>8 Romans 8:38-39</b>	<b>Bay Allen</b>	FAITH COMMUNITY UMC / RIVERVIEW UMC
<b>9 Luke 7:22-23</b>	<b>Cynthia Bloise</b>	JEFFERSON UMC
<b>10 A Liturgical Prayer</b>	<b>Chad Bogdewick</b>	OAKLAND AVE. UMC
<b>11 2 Corinthians 1:10</b>	<b>Bay Allen</b>	FAITH COMMUNITY UMC / RIVERVIEW UMC
<b>12 Romans Chapter 8</b>	<b>Brandon Moore</b>	SHANNOPIN AND GLENWILLARD UMC
<b>13 James 4:8</b>	<b>Bay Allen</b>	FAITH COMMUNITY UMC / RIVERVIEW UMC
<b>14 Psalm 46</b>	<b>Joshua Demi</b>	MILLERSTOWN AND WALTER CHAPEL UMC
<b>15 1 Kings 19: 11-13</b>	<b>Janet Lord</b>	COORDINATOR OF MINISTERIAL SERVICES, WPAUMC
<b>16 Psalm 11:5</b>	<b>Cynthia Bloise</b>	JEFFERSON UMC
<b>17 Ephesians 6:12</b>	<b>Bay Allen</b>	FAITH COMMUNITY UMC / RIVERVIEW UMC
<b>18 Psalm 51</b>	<b>Dawn Hargraves</b>	BROWNSVILLE FIRST UMC AND CALIFORNIA UMC
<b>19 Psalm 56:3-4</b>	<b>Sarah E. Adkins</b>	BETHEL (EAU CLAIRE), BOYERS, AND HILLIARD UMCS
<b>20 Psalm 56:3-4 (part two)</b>	<b>Sarah E. Adkins</b>	BETHEL (EAU CLAIRE), BOYERS, AND HILLIARD UMCS
<b>21 Psalm 46:1-3</b>	<b>Darryl Lockie</b>	COLLEGE HILL UMC
<b>22 Philippians 4:6-7</b>	<b>Bay Allen</b>	FAITH COMMUNITY UMC / RIVERVIEW UMC

Have you ever been so excited about something that you couldn't sleep? Perhaps you were going on a big trip, or looking forward to Christmas morning, a first date, or perhaps your birthday — sometimes when we are excited, we can't sleep. We lie awake, tossing and turning, watching the clock tick down 'til daybreak (akin to watching water boil, let me tell you!) If you have experienced this before, you don't need me to tell you that when you are exceptionally anxious, or worrisome about something, that too can make it difficult to sleep.

When we are worried, or anxious, we can't sleep because we are often too busy imagining worst case scenarios instead of enjoying a peaceful night's rest. In fact, *peace* is usually the last thing we expect to find in these situations. That is why this scripture is so meaningful today. “*In peace I will lie down and sleep*”. This scripture reminds us that we don't have to lie down and sleep in a state of unrest, or anxiety, or worry, or fear — we can lie down and sleep in *peace*. How is this possible? Well, as we meditate upon these words, we see that this *peace* doesn't come from a positive news report on television, or even that perfectly timed call from a loved one who just wanted to check in and see if we were ok — our peace comes from realizing that the “*Lord alone will keep me safe.*” We can rest, because we *can* trust in our God.

I pray that you are able to trust in God, and that you are able to sleep a little more soundly, knowing that the Lord alone will “*keep you safe*”. The word *keep* shows us that our safety is not contingent upon our circumstances, but upon the steadfastness of our Lord. May such knowledge allow us all to rest a little easier, and get the rest that we need to face whatever comes next, experiencing it all in the safekeeping of our Lord.

---

*God, thank you for the safety you give, even in the midst of my doubt and worry. Calm me today, that I may find rest. Allow me to experience your peace that passes understanding, so that I may lie down and sleep, knowing that you are at work keeping me safe in all circumstances. In the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.*

Jesus' feeding over 5,000 people have always fascinated me. Maybe it struck the New Testament authors as well because this is the one miracle that appears all Four Gospels. One thing that has always bothered and inspired me is the image of Jesus standing in the midst of what might be called a crisis while the disciples are assessing, scheming, making very practical conclusions of what it all means, and what it means to be disciples apart from Jesus. How easy it is to forget Him with the pressure is on. There are so many hungry people in a deserted place! Resources are few. Options are limited. Everyone is tired. The pressure is high. Vision is low.

Maybe the disciples have personal history that compels them to do whatever they can to avoid the pain of scarcity and failure again. Maybe they are worried that this situation would damage Jesus' reputation or their's. Maybe they are afraid of not really having something to offer. Maybe the gnawing pressure of having to figure it all out on their own is governing their hearts.

One thing is clear: The disciples have already decided what had to be done and what Jesus had to do—send everyone away! A miracle was out of the question. That sort of prayer, way of acting, and conviction just wasn't practical enough. Then, Jesus puts it back on the disciples—they are told to feed the people. But how could they? They say that they do not have anything which is not true: They have five loaves of bread and two fish. Fear and Worry have a way of distorting how we see the world, God, others, and ourselves. Jesus calls them to give to Him what they have in their hands. Why?

Whatever God has provided in the pressure, God can provide a miracle as we surrender our whole hearts and lives to Jesus. Pause for a moment. How might the Holy Spirit be inviting you to sort out your heart before the Lord during these strange times? Where is Jesus standing in your midst?

---

*Lord Jesus, You are standing in my midst. Awaken me to Your Presence. Sort out of my heart to know and trust You. Be and do what only You can do. And help me to join You. Amen.*

Coming up against any difficulty we are faced with countless things that could weigh down upon us, but none are as profound as the thought that we are *alone*. This scripture reminds us that with God, no matter what we face, we do not face it alone. Moreover, we find that we are not actually in uncharted waters for “*God goes before you*” shows us that whatever we face didn’t catch God by surprise.

To have faith in difficult situations means to rest assured that God knows these waters; just as Jesus walked upon the waters, and said to the waters to *be still* — God is making a way through our troubled seas even before we experience them! Whatever trouble may come your way, be it a layoff from your job; wondering where to find a loaf of bread, or toilet paper; or whether or not a loved one (or yourself) has COVID-19...remember, “*do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.*” for “*The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.*”

---

*God, help me to remember that you are with me, even when I feel so all alone. Please grant me the courage to rise above difficulty, the peace to know that you are with me, and the ability to help another who is struggling in their own stormy sea — in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

When I was a small kid, I was afraid of darkness. Growing up in Sri Lanka, my parents would often take me on mission trips towns without electricity. So, at sundown, it would become so dark. I would become so afraid to walk outside. In these rural towns it is rare to have bathrooms in the house. There would be community toilets in middle of the village. If I had to use the toilet in the middle of the night, I had to wake my father up and go with him. He would wait outside, and I would be inside holding a torch. I called out to him every few seconds to make sure he was still there.

We usually fear the things we do not know. Things we do not have knowledge of. Things we do not have experience of. In today's text, Joshua was afraid. Moses, the great leader had just passed away and Joshua had to step up to the role. He spent a lot of time watching how Moses led the people.

However, watching Moses lead, and leading himself were two very different things. Joshua was under great pressure. A small mistake may lead to a catastrophe. So, Joshua was a curled up in a corner worrying and in fear.

There was only one place he could turn to. He looked up to God. God then commands him.

At first, I found this odd. God does not speak words of comfort, but commands Joshua to be strong and courageous. Soon, I realized that the next part is important. The Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

When we pray, we ask God for things. We ask God for health. We ask God for healing. We ask God for Success. We ask God for other riches in life. But by doing so we are missing the point. How often do we pray for his presence? We think God gives us all those things ask for. However, Jesus tells us otherwise. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells us ask for His Kingdom and His righteousness and everything will be filled. This means that God does not give us health, but God is our health. God does not give us healing, but God is our healing. God does not give us success, but God is our success.

When God is with us, there is no need for anything else, because God is everything and He will fill anything that is lacking. No wonder John Wesley once said, "The greatest of all is God with us"

I am not going to lie. As we tread this time of uncertainty, it will be scary, it will be depressing, and it will be frustrating. However, God is commanding you as God commanded Joshua almost three thousand years ago: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

---

*God, remind us that there is no need for anything else, because You are everything. Amen.*

**Romans 8:38-39** Bay Allen

There are times when we look at the things that are going on in the world, and we think, “there is just too much evil.” We see the crimes that are reported on the 11 o’clock news, or on our newsfeed online, or even those reports that sneak into our daily conversations with friends or random encounters in community...and it is hard for us to see God at work.

Today’s scripture can be read many ways — has been read many different ways! I used to read this scripture from the personal perspective. “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers...” will separate me from God’s great love. I go on to read, “neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate...” and then a certain word pops off the page — us. Us.

When reading this scripture from a personal perspective, sure, it offers hope and serves as a great reminder of God’s love. But the problem in reading it from such a perspective is the word us.

In the midst of this coronavirus outbreak, we are concerned with hand sanitizer, and carrying antibacterial wipes, answering face masks...we don’t want to get it! Are we just as concerned with our neighbors? Are we offering them aide in the midst of crisis? Are we offering prayer as often as we pray for ourselves, or our close family members? I think today’s scripture reminds us that the love of God...is so great...that us, all of us, whatever we face together is not enough to separate us from God’s great love! God’s love is bigger than anything anyone of us faces, because God’s love is bigger than the total sum of all collected things that all us can or ever will experience — it’s bigger!

May God’s great love encompass you today, and may you remind someone else who is in the midst of struggle, that God’s great love is bigger than whatever they face, too. We are all in this together, and we are all in this together so that God’s great love may shine through. Share the love!

---

*God, whenever I become preoccupied with how large my difficulties are, may you remind me that your love is larger. Whenever I selfishly look hold onto and to hoard your love for me, may I remember that your love is for all of us, and grant me the ability to share your love whenever I get the chance. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

Today, in keeping up with the COVID-19 developments around the world, I read about the new 21-day complete lockdown in India. Even though they have only recorded 519 cases as of today, March 24, officials in India are aware they have many additional complications which may put their population at risk.

Did you know that there are still slums in India in which the “semi-permanent” housing has no running water and no indoor plumbing? Can you imagine being diligent about washing your hands if you lived in a place where you got your household water from a communal spigot or from a tanker truck that came to your neighborhood and no means to get antibacterial wipes?

When we speak of China, we often talk about it having one of the densest populations in the world with an average of 377 people per square mile. In contrast, the US has an average of 87 people per square mile. But India is worse. There are 1,072 people per mile and it is estimated that 1/3 of their population lives in the slums mentioned above.

We feel really inconvenienced and stressed during this period of staying-at-home during the pandemic. We don't really feel very blessed most of the time. One of the things that helps me to stay positive and able to be an unanxious presence for others is to keep the perspective of how blessed we are, even in the midst of such disease and sickness. How blessed are we who know and believe in Jesus as our hope and shield during this time!

---

*Almighty God, we believe, but help us in our unbelief. Show us ways to experience and appreciate our blessedness in the moments when we begin to feel downhearted. We know the promises of Jesus to be present and to heal. Help us to grasp these promises during these days, trusting that our earth and its population will be healed in your time. Amen.*

*A Liturgical Prayer by Chad Bogdewick*

We trust in you, O Lord  
Even though life is confusing,  
We still trust you, Jesus.

We love you, O Lord  
Even though we feel alone,  
We still love you, Jesus.

We praise you, O Lord  
Even though our hearts are heavy,  
We still praise you, Jesus.

We sing to you, O Lord  
Even though our voices tremble,  
We still sing to you, Jesus.

We hope in you, O Lord  
Even though we feel lost,  
We still hope in you, Jesus.

We follow you, O Lord  
Even though our feet are tired,  
We still follow you, Jesus.

We worship you, O Lord  
Even though we may not comprehend,  
We still worship you, Jesus.

We are saved, O Lord  
Even though we feel lost,  
We are saved by you, Jesus.

---

*Use this prayer three times a day, morning, noon, and night.*

My Son is a climber...I don't mean that he is a rockclimber, a mountain climber, not does he climb towers — my son is only five-years-old, but he climbs whatever he can. He climbs kitchen chairs. He climbs on refrigerators. Cabinets. Ladders at the park. Slides at the park, even though I tell him, “up ladders, down slides.” But here's the thing, sometimes he bites off more than he can chew. He climbs, but then freezes, hanging there limp, screaming out for help. I sweep in to the rescue...I mean he's only five feet off the ground.

There are times that we climb what we shouldn't. There are times that we climb because we must, but what I love about today's scripture is that it reminds us that God will rescue us. Over, and over again — God rescues us. Many of us feel like a child hanging from a tree limb, screaming out for our Father to come to our rescue. I want you to know today that he is already here, ready to catch you. Fall into Jesus, he will catch you. “Place your confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue.” I don't think this means if you lack any confidence, or if you doubt that God won't necessarily rescue you...I think it is saying that we can place our confidence in Jesus, because just as he has rescued us, he's going to do it again and again. Just keep your eyes open, you'll see. “We have placed our confidence in him, and he continues to rescue us.”

---

*God, I pray that you remind me of how you have rescued in the past, so that I may see that you will continue to rescue in the present, and in the future. Give me eyes to see the love you have for me, and when I feel like I'm dangling from a tree limb, running out of energy to hold on, remind me that you are there to catch me even if I fall. May I place my confidence in you, and point others to do the same. In the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.*

One of my absolute favorite chapters in the Bible is Romans 8. This chapter has been so transforming for me that I actually have “Romans 8” tattooed on my left arm. You may be wondering why this particular chapter is so important. I see this chapter as the identity chapter. If we read Romans 6,7, & 8 together we see this progression of our former selves and how we are transformed into the new identity in Romans 8. My favorite is verse 1 where Paul writes, “Therefore there is now no condemnation in Christ.” Too many times in my life, I have done something that I have regret over. I have asked Christ to forgive me, but I still continue to beat myself up over it. I think it is important to remember that if Christ doesn’t condemn us, we shouldn’t condemn ourselves either.

I also happen to love verses 14-17. Paul writes about God purchasing our adoption at a great price. There is something very different about our adoption as children of God. Most of the time, in our human societal constructs, adopted children are seen as less than equal to natural born children. However, in God’s Kingdom, we see that our adoption comes with the same full birthright that Christ has. We are heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ. For me this thrills my soul that we as adopted children can share fully in the glory with Jesus.

In verse 18-30 we see this description of suffering. Paul is writing about the current sufferings that the Christians faced in the First Century. However, we can see some of those same sufferings in 2020. We see the truth of the Spirit helping us in our weakness in our daily lives just as it sustained the early Christians. In verse 28 we receive this assurance of who God really is. “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love God and are called according to God’s purpose.” That is a verse that give me great hope, even as I am stuck at home amid a COVID-19 pandemic. This is why all of us should seek to be optimistic, even in the terrible situations. God will always use what is meant to harm us to bring about good. There may be some suffering in it, but God always has our good in sight. When I read verse 31-39, I realize that this lack of condemnation, filling of the Spirit, and promise to work things for our good is not just for Christians to conquer things. This adoption is not just God being on our side and assuring us that if God is with us who can stand against us. We see that this is more about a lack of separation from the love of Christ. That is where we gain our greatest hope that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

---

*God, today as we face this pandemic, uncertain situations, and all of the terrible things that go along with it, I pray that my brothers and sisters in Christ are able to spend time learning their identity in you. I pray that today they know that nothing, not even a pandemic and quarantine can separate us from your love. In Jesus name, AMEN.*

Ever since the coronavirus first hit, hand sanitizer and cleaning agents have been flying off the shelves. It is amazing, I said to my wife, “what, no one washed their hands until now? How come these shelves aren’t empty every other day? Kind of makes me question all those handshakes over the years.” It’s a rather funny thought to contemplate, but the truth is, people were washing their hands prior to the coronavirus, but the virus put before us a heightened urge to see to it that we don’t forget to wash.

Today’s scripture is similar. It reminds us to “wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts,” and it almost wounds like a mandate from the CDC. We think about this, how can we wash our hands? How can we purify? James tells us, “come close to God, and God will come close to you.” We cannot simply go to the grocery store and purchase soul sanitizer — we need to draw close to God. Nothing else will do. The further we get from God, the further we get from purifying our hearts.

How can we put as much time and focus on purifying our hearts as we have been at simply washing our hands? How can we work toward coming clean spiritually, a work that ultimately is done on our behalf by our Savior — “come close to God, and God will come close to you.” That is the answer. Quit looking to the world, and how the world comes clean, that cleanliness that will only go skin deep; instead, look to God for a spiritual cleansing which begins with the simple act of drawing near, the desire to “come close.”

---

*God, I desire to come close to you, today. I don't hope to merely be in your presence, but to come close. Draw me near. Purify my soul. Cleanse my hands, but cleanse also my heart, so that I may see that the sinfulness I carry can truly be washed away by you, and so that others may see that, with you, the shelves are never empty because what we need cannot be bought or sold! Your grace is sufficient! Remind me, today, that my life depends upon drawing close to you. God, as I come close, I pray that you also will come close to me. In the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.*

“Though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;” (Psalm 46:2b), for many of us it feels like that is what is happening. Our worlds have been rocked, the ground beneath us has begun to shake. It is startling that something that, not long ago, seemed so distant, something that affected those far across the sea, has come to change our lives so much. The mountains are shaking. Yet, this is not how the psalmist begins. The psalmist begins with, assurance “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth should change...” (Psalm 46:1-2a). We do not fear, though the earth may shake, for God is with us. Therefore, today we arise. We will be cautious, we will be wise, but today we arise. A few weeks ago, we celebrated the feast of St. Patrick. St. Patrick was born in Britain but kidnapped as a young man and sold into slavery in Ireland. After several years, he escaped and returned home. Eventually, Patrick sensed a call to return to those horrifying shores where he had been taken, to share the gospel with the people of Ireland. In light of how frightening it must have been to return to that place, it’s unsurprising that one of the few of his writings that have survived is a prayer of protection, often called “St. Patrick’s Breastplate”. Each section of the prayer begins with three words: “I arise today”.

Like Patrick, we are venturing out into unnerving shores. There is much we don’t know about what lies ahead. Yet, we know who goes before us. Whatever it may look like for us, we arise. Knowing that for most of us it looks like staying home taking care of ourselves, praying for the world, and refusing to give into anxiety, we arise. We arise today, not in ignorance nor foolishness, not testing God by taking unnecessary risks with our health, but in wisdom and faith.

Yes, it is a scary place. The unknown shores that lie ahead are dark and chilling. Yet, we know who carries across those waters. Our God is a refuge and strength, a very present help in time of need. We will not be foolish or foolhardy, but we will not bow down, we will not cower. Whatever it may look like for us right now, today we arise. As you do so, as you arise today, I invite you to pray this brief prayer, adapted from the St. Patrick’s Breastplate:

*I arise today through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity, through a belief in the threeness, through confession of the oneness of the Creator of creation.*

*I arise today through God's strength to pilot me; God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom to guide me, God's eye to look before me, God's ear to hear me, God's word to speak for me, God's hand to guard me, God's way to lie before me, God's shield to protect me, God's hosts to save me, from snares of the devil, from temptations of vices, from everyone who desires me ill,*

*afar and anear, alone or in a multitude. Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me, Christ in the eye that sees me, Christ in the ear that hears me. I arise today through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity, through a belief in the threeness, through a confession of the oneness, of the Creator of creation.*

These are Interesting Times, to say the least. A lot of us are feeling a bit overwhelmed, trying to keep up with the latest news while still caring for ourselves, our families and our congregations. We aren't sure what is coming next, or what to do next.

Elijah, after his resounding victory on Mt. Carmel, runs to Horeb seeking guidance from God. One thing after another happens (sound familiar?): a mighty wind, an earthquake, a fire. But God's voice came through none of those, but in the silence that followed.

While we are battered on all sides, but quarantined at home, maybe we need to acknowledge the gift of silence, and wait for God to speak to us.

---

*"Breathe through the heats of our desire  
thy coolness and thy balm;  
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,  
O still, small voice of calm."  
(UMH 358; words by John Greenleaf Whittier)*

As these days of stay-at-home quarantine drag on, I find myself increasingly disturbed by some of the savage actions I have seen in the news. I just read of an Asian man who was in the store when a woman passing by yelled at him, “F—- you!” for no particular reason. She then removed her face mask and coughed directly on him.

When we are stressed and feeling out of control, it is so tempting to try to find blame for the situation in which we find ourselves. Jesus experienced this as the Pharisees and Scribes who witnessed healings and who felt as if they were losing their political power rejected his teaching, and even claimed that Jesus’ healings were done by the Evil One rather than by God. We know that ultimately, their fear translated into blaming Jesus all the way to the cross on which he was killed.

How are we called to respond in cases of violence? In the case of the aggressively angry woman in the above anecdote and others like her, I hope and pray they do not proclaim to be followers of Jesus. As Christians, or “little Christs”, our goal is to speak to and behave toward others in the way Jesus would. There is no instance in which Jesus was hateful or blaming toward others, so we cannot condone this behavior. In fact, that is a time to put on our most courageous self and stand in defense of the person being attacked. Saying nothing in the presence of racism or injustice is not an option for us. For me, I need to imagine myself being that courageous person in order to be ready in case I am called to defend someone. Imagine yourself being courageous for Christ!

---

*Courageous and Powerful Lord, I want to follow you and your teaching. Sometimes it is hard because I feel so out of control and I desperately want to blame someone. In theory, if I blame them, they can fix this. Keep my heart soft. Give me eyes to see beyond myself. I know you made us to be courageous like you were, so for that measure of courage, we pray. Amen.*

In the 90's there was this comedy show on television called Viva Variety, not the most wholesome show, but it had it funny moments. There was this one episode, and the male and female host were bantering back and forth, and finally the man says to the woman, "why must you always kick a man when he's down?" To which his quick-witted co-host replied, "well, when a man is always down, when else are you supposed to kick him?" This reminds me of today's scripture in this way, many of us experience a "kicking" so many times, it makes us wonder if there is anything else to experience. It's like sitting right at the breaking point of the waves in the ocean, they just keep rolling in on you, one after another with hardly a chance to catch your breath before the next one hits.

Today's scripture reminds us that our battle is taking place in the spiritual realm. There is a "kicking" that is going on, we are coming up against "rulers, against the authorities against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil..." The Devil loves to kick a man when he's down. Loves to kick a woman when she's down. The Devil doesn't even spare the children, kicking them when they're down.

So often we forget about the spiritual struggle that is taking place, we become preoccupied with what is happening to us physically, but the warfare is taking place in the spiritual realm. This is all the more reason to equip ourselves not with respirators and masks and sanitizer...but with righteousness, more prayer, and sanctification! Come before God in prayer and realize that he is fighting for you in the spiritual realms. You may feel like you are being kicked...that you are down...but cast your burdens upon the Lord and He will raise you up.

---

*God, remind me today that as bad as things may seem, that they are so much better because I have you fighting for me. God, intervene today...let me experience more victory, less kicking. Those forces of evil that rise up against me, and against our world right now, God, defeat them. Allow your mighty power to be displayed on earth as it is in heaven. Also, allow me to point others to the victory that they share in Jesus name, I pray. Amen.*

- Light a candle. Take a minute or two to breathe in and out, focusing on each breath. Breathe in the spirit and breathe out what burdens.

**Reflection** (a poem by D. Hargraves)

*Where can I find you,  
deep inside a rose  
o just outside my window?  
Where can I find you,  
in the memory of a photograph  
or a post on social media?  
Where can I find you,  
in the hope for tomorrow  
or in the despair of today?  
Where can I find you,  
in the pew of a church  
or the voice of a friend?  
Where can I find you?  
Lord, where might I find you?  
Jesus, where are you?  
Holy Spirit, where are you?  
Yahweh, where are you? I AM with you, always.*

Psalm 51 gives us words when our own are far from our lips. Words that express the depth of who we are, how we feel, where we have regret, how we need joy, and even the yearning that comes in times like these.

Psalm 51 moves us to joy and relationship with God. It moves us through grace into forgiveness, peace, purity, and relationship.

This psalm of David reminds us of the great relationship of David and Nathan. We all need a Nathan in our lives. One who loves us so, that the strength of that relationship stands up to difficult truth. Someone to say, “stop”. Or someone to say, “that is enough”. For this day, may the voice of the One who loves us completely be heard in our ears, saying to us “Stop. Rest in my peace. Pause for My hope. Give to me that which burdens you that you would know that I am your God, the God of lovingkindness.”

---

*Triune God forgive me where I have need of forgiveness. Guide me to be forgiving. In Jesus name, grant me your righteousness. Strengthen my joy for You. Encourage my praise of You. And move me to share Your joy with others, today and always. May the peace of you Lord be with me, with us. In Jesus name through the Holy Spirit, Amen. All honor and glory to God.*

It's okay to be afraid. Fear is a natural response to what is going on in the world right now. It doesn't mean you don't have faith. Even your pastor has had some fear from time to time over recent days. Fear can even be good for us sometimes if it leads us to address real threats. It's okay to have fears, as long as we aren't *ruled* by them. 2 Timothy 1:7 tells us, though, that "God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline." The Scriptures are filled with people who were afraid. And often an angel of the Lord came to them and assuaged their fears. When we have faith in God, we don't have to let our fears make decisions for us. Faith, as Hebrews tells us, is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." And we have faith that God is truly Emmanuel and will be with us through the difficult times.

When I received a phone call from my doctor after some routine blood work and she told me I was in renal failure and needed to go immediately to the hospital, I was afraid. When I got to the Emergency room, it was all I could do not to freak out. Plus my drive to the hospital was nerve racking. I was driving in the midst of a winter storm, the road was barely visible in the darkness of night, my GPS quit working, I went 7 miles beyond where I needed to go. But God got me there! The medical professionals got me on an IV pretty quickly and began to treat me. I had hypercalcemia, which meant my calcium levels were too high, which was damaging my kidneys.

I was afraid, and I prayed to God for help. I tried to let go of the fear and give it all to Him. I knew logically that my fear would not change anything and that God was ultimately in control. It was easier said than done.

But God was with me through my time in the hospital and I had many people praying for me. I believe in the power of prayer. Our God is a God who answers prayers, even if it's not always the answer we want. If my calcium level hadn't been high and I hadn't gone to the hospital, I may never have been ultimately diagnosed with sarcoidosis and able to receive treatment for it. I had been sickly for a while and never knew the reason. God knows what would have happened to me if the doctors in the hospital hadn't caught what was really going on. Being seriously ill has been a blessing for me. It has brought me closer to God and I've had to take a hard look at my priorities after I was faced with my own mortality.

*(continued tomorrow...)*

---

*Dear God,*

*You who are our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,*

*Please sustain us through these trying times. Help us to remember that you are truly Emmanuel, which means God With Us.*

*Help us to stay connected with You and with each other. Amen.*

*Psalm 56:3-4 (part two) Sarah E. Adkins*

Just because we have faith does not mean we will not have struggles. In fact, it is expected that we will go through trials. After all, Jesus reminded us that in this world we'll have trouble (John 16:33). Simply being a person of faith or doing the right things doesn't mean that we will be spared from earthly harm, illness, or suffering. But it does mean that we can face our fears, with God's help. How many times has faith helped you through tough times? Many, I am certain and your faith in God will help all of us now. And We have faith that Jeremiah 29:11 is still true:

11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

So, while it's okay to have doubts and fears (God can handle them), we must also live by faith. And faith impels us to act in love. As 1 John 4:18 tells us: "perfect love casts out fear." Even though we are staying physically away from each other right now, we need to maintain being spiritually connected with our families, friends, and church families. We can even show love to strangers, who are also our neighbors in this world. Remember what Jesus said the two greatest commandments are: "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'<sup>38</sup> This is the greatest and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

Even though we are maintaining "social distance" to combat the spread of the virus, we must remain connected to one another and that will help us stay connected with God, too, as we encourage one another and share our burdens. We are blessed to be able to stay in contact with social media and over the phone. We must never quit loving or praying for each other.

Today, many people are being affected by the pandemic. Many people are struggling with very fear. But we must remember that God (Emmanuel) is with us. I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, only God knows that. But I do know that I want to let God use me. That I want to serve God by serving others. And that God will get us through this.

---

*Dear God,*

*You who are our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,*

*Please sustain us through these trying times. Help us to remember that you are truly Emmanuel, which means God With Us.*

*Help us to stay connected with You and with each other. Amen.*

**Psalm 46:1-3**      *Darryl Lockie*

As I write this message it is late March, which means a few days have likely passed by the time you read it. Who knows what has changed since then? I could only imagine the additional closings, different news cycles, and crazy stories that have since emerged surrounding the coronavirus. These are some strange times, aren't they? Honestly, I'd love to spend this sharing baby anecdotes with you (my wife Bethany and I just had our first-born child, Asher, on March 4<sup>th</sup>; how is that for ridiculous timing?), just like you'd probably like to be out and about living your lives; meeting with friends, eating out, not needing to take a valium before heading out to your local Walmart. Yes, simply being able to worship with one another in person would be really nice about now. While these measures of social distancing seem extreme, they appear to be exactly what we need to do to stop the spread.

Yet for all the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19, it is no small comfort that our God has promised His life giving presence for these very moments. One passage I've been going back to a lot lately is Psalm 46. In the same measure that coronavirus is spreading fear, this passage scatters hope. Its first 3 verses read, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging." Lately, it does feel as though the earth is giving way doesn't it, though perhaps on a much more molecular level? Yet we have ample reason to not be overcome, even amidst all the anxiety.

We needn't be overcome with fear for many reasons really. We needn't fear not only for the valiant and selfless efforts of our health-care professionals, not only because of the incredible technology we have today, with tools like ventilators, and not only because for most people this virus will be similar to nothing more than a very bad cold. Rather, most importantly we needn't fear because we are not alone in this. Our God stands with us in the midst of these troubles and as always He stands larger than the difficulties we face (sorry coronavirus, your name aside, we ultimately know who wears the crown!) Indeed, as this first verse tells us, it is these very types of situations where God makes His presence known. If we look back our Lord does some of His best work in times of darkness and is rather prone to show up powerfully and tangibly in the lives of His people during crises. Remember my friends, even Easter Sunday started out at a tomb, but as our God showed up, it didn't end there. I think we might consider the same with this situation we face today. So, where is God in the midst of the coronavirus? Our God is right here, perhaps even closer now. As such, God is working through His church, providing His Spirit to comfort the anxious, and His hope for all those afflicted. And for that truth, along with the Psalmist, we will not fear.

---

*Dear Lord, in the midst of this darkness we know that Your presence can still be found. Perhaps even now we might come to experience it as closer than ever, as you are a God who is close to the afflicted. We find rest in that truth. We take courage in that truth. You are our refuge and our strength. Therefore, while we lament in the places where we feeling anxious and worried, as we know you give us ample space for that, still we will not be overcome with fear. Indeed, your presence casts it out. In so doing we declare the words of your servant Corrie, we are trusting this, an unknown future, to you, a known God. Amen.*

A posture of prayer. Many of us have learned that when times are tough, we come to God with our prayer “requests,” that are generally more like prayer “orders,” if we’re honest about it. We come before God demanding this deliverance, or that deliverance; this healing or that healing; sometimes we even demand, like King David, that our enemies get their just deserts while we enjoy a banquet table set before them. A posture of prayer.

How do you pray? The Apostle Paul taught to “*pray without ceasing.*” The disciples asked this of Jesus, and he said, “*Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.'*”

How do you pray? When you come before God in prayer, are you anxious about anything? Are you giving God thanks in everything? Are you presenting requests, or demands, unto God? I struggle with these things myself, but today’s scripture reminds us that this is the posture of prayer that we should take...one that is not anxious, one that is full of thanks, one that is no demanding — when we pray like this God’s peace comes to us! A peace that passes all understanding.

Take a moment today, a posture of prayer. Take a couple of minutes to come before God in praise and thanksgiving, and out of that thanksgiving may God give you a beautiful gift. God may not give you everything you request, but I pray that God will offer you the gift of peace.

---

*God, allow me to experience your peace on this day. Where I am anxious, remove my anxiety. Where I am holding things in, empower me to give those things over to you. Where I feel I am lacking, reveal to me the thanksgiving of my heart that I may come to you giving thanks. Allow me to experience your peace, and to become a peaceful presence for others in every situation, in the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.*

# W ilderness W ords

©2020 All authors retain the copyright of their own material published herein,  
but it has been offered up as a resource for free distribution for those who desire to use it for private worship.  
Any corporate reading, performance, inclusion, please reach out to the original author for permission.