



Day One

Strong Women, Soft Hearts

On a Journey With God....

What an amazing thing it is to live your actual day-to-day experience as though God is really here...present with you, closer than the shade on your right hand. You live your story—with its disappointment and joys, frustrations and possibilities—knowing that God is telling a story through your life set on the stage of the Great Story of the ages, His story. This psalm is a great help in getting perspective...as you think about the tale of redemption God is writing through your life.

In the Beginning...

Psalm 116 is an overview psalm, written as though you could stand back and see the whole story of your life at a glance. Let its words carry you inside the word that God wants to say to you about your life in Him. Try paraphrasing this in your own words with your actual experience in mind.

**I love the Lord because He hears my voice and my supplications.
Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call on Him as long as I live.
The cords of death encompassed me, and the terrors of Sheol came upon me,
I found distress and sorrow.
Then I called on the name of the Lord: "Oh, Lord, I beseech Thee, save my life!"**

In the next section, the Psalmist draws comfort from the compassion and character of God. How would you put these verses in your own words and experience?

**"Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yes, our God is compassionate.
The Lord preserves the simple; I was brought low and He saved me.
Return to your rest, oh my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.
For Thou has rescued my soul from death and my eyes from tears,
My feet from stumbling.
I shall walk before the Lord in the land of the living."**

The Psalmist admits that sometimes, it appears to him as though “all men are liars.” (verse 11) Who hasn’t felt like that in their more honest moments? He then begins to focus on his own longing to offer something to God...out of all God has given him.

**What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits toward me?
I shall lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord...
in the presence of his people...**

**O, Lord, surely I am your servant the son of Thy handmaid, for Thou has loosed my bonds.
To Thee I shall offer a sacrifice of Thanksgiving, and call upon the name of the Lord.
I shall pay my vows to the Lord; oh may it be in the presence of his people...**

What is it about God’s work in your life that most prompts this kind of heartfelt devotion...a just-let-me-serve-You-well response, out of all God has done to free me and bring me to Himself?

In the End...



Day Two

The Race You Are Meant to Run

Perhaps nowhere in Scripture is so much truth about what it means to follow God packed into such a small space as you find in the first two verses of Hebrews 12. See what insights God gives you about your own journey in Christ...about the race you are meant to run.

In the Beginning...

If you glance at the chapter that comes before (chapter 11), you find a whole choir loft of “heroes” of the faith, whose example provides a steady source of encouragement in your own race. You are not alone. In fact, in a larger sense, they are there on the sideline to cheer you on.

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us...

What other Christians in your family who are already with the Lord do you picture as part of those “witnesses” cheering you on? In what way does that encourage you right now?

Take a few moments to pray about the particular set of fears and insecurities that bind your own soul (encumbrances). Can you name them fairly easily? How are you asking God to touch those?

What is the recurring sin to which you feel most vulnerable? What do you need most from God...from other Christians, in order to be able to feel less “entangled” by it?

...and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

How would you describe the particular “race” that is set before you? How does it differ from other friends/family and what causes you to be in need of endurance as you run?

...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith,

What encouragement do you draw from the reality of Jesus being the author...and the One who perfects your faith?

...who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

There were two opposite realities present for Jesus in His own “race”—the joy of being with the Father and of accomplishing what He came for and right alongside, the shame he endured at the hands of sinful men. Joy that pulled him forward...and shame that he despised along the way. Where do you experience those contrasts of joy amidst shame in your life?

How does the example of Jesus give you strength and endurance?

In the End

**To grow up
is to find the small part you are playing
in this extraordinary drama
written by
Someone else.**

Madeleine L’Engle



Day Three

Light on Your Path

A passionate life springs from an inner awareness that you don't belong to yourself. God had laid his hand on you for purposes that result in your good...and his glory. No one in the New Testament seems to be more aware of that than Paul—a man whose past included such antagonism toward the faith that he happily stoned Christians. Coming to faith in Jesus was a miracle for Paul. It is a miracle for each of us. That God would have a purpose for our lives in him is the light we follow all our days.

In the Beginning...

In the book of Philippians, Paul looks at his life, past and future. All his achievements and his pedigree as “the best Jew”, all his own efforts to live a righteous life—Paul looks back and counts it all as so much rubbish (3: 1-8). When he compares all he knew before to knowing Jesus now, the past looks like nothing.

...that I may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death in order that I may attain to the resurrection of the dead. (vs. 9,10)

Paul speaks of knowing Christ in his present state—in the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. What are some of the small hints and the particular moments in your life when you experience a kind of “fellowship” with Christ in something you suffer...and when you sense that the very power which raised Jesus from the dead is, likewise, infusing some aspect of your present life?

Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethern, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

We use the phrase, “doing what I was born for,” to describe that sense of God having laid hold of us for a particular purpose. In God’s kingdom there is no real economy of “big” or “small”—even a cup of cold water given in his name does not go unnoticed by him. (Or as D.L. Moody once said: “There is nothing small that God is in.”) Now given that, what are some of the “small” moments when you sense the pleasure of God as you step into something that represents his purposes for your life?

What would it mean in your own life to “forget what lies behind and to reach forward to what lies ahead...”?

What does it mean to you that Paul could be smack dab in the middle of evangelizing the known world and yet he, too, says...”not that I have laid hold of it yet, but I press on for the prize...”? What encouragement do you find in his words?

In the End:

“The place God has for you is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”

Frederick Buechner



Day Four

An Affair of the Heart

God pursues your heart—the source of your loyalty, affection, and desires. He made you to know your truest joy in worship...that wholehearted surrender your deepest self. But alas...our hearts are easily seduced. We allow them to be captured by lesser things. We give our hearts away.

In the Beginning...

When God's people were preparing to enter the promised land, Moses warned them to watch their hearts carefully. Everything that really matters begins there. Or as Amy Carmichael once said, "Be careful what you set your heart upon for it surely will be yours." This classic passage begins in the 8th chapter of Deuteronomy.

"When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and his ordinance and His statutes...lest, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply...then you heart becomes proud, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." (8: 10-14)

Have you noticed that the "good times" are often the most spiritually precarious? What is Moses warning us about when things are coming up roses?

What does "forgetting" look like in your life?

“In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end. Otherwise, you may say in your heart, ‘My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.’”

(8:16,17)

Think of the last major crisis or trial in your life. What difference would it have made in your life if you were convinced that God allowed that circumstance....so that He might do you good? How would that have changed the way you experienced it?

What is the natural tendency of all our hearts when life is easy and things are going good?

What image...or behavior...or person...or longing most represents to you the place where your heart tends to be captured by something other than the Lord?

I often return to these words of Moses to remind myself of the great need in my life to offer my heart, over and over, to God alone. Moses said,

“Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently lest you forget the things your eyes have seen and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life...” Deut. 4:9

In the end:

**“Turn my heart, O Lord, like rivers of water,
Turn my heart, O Lord, in your hand...
Till my whole life flows in the river of your spirit
And my name brings honor to the Lamb.”**

Author unknown



Day Five

An Intimate Look at the Love of God

In the New Testament we see the heart of God in the person of Jesus—his compassion, his sacrificial love, his mercy. But in the Old Testament prophets, God pours out the passion of his heart as a King who comes in search of the beloved who has been lost to him and who has chosen other lovers. The imagery is both convicting...and comforting.

In the Beginning...

Zephaniah is a small book with a glorious message. It begins on a strong note of God's judgment...and it ends in that place of restoration which we know now partly in Christ and will one day, know completely. The passage that ends Zephaniah is one of the most captivating passages on the love of God in the entire Bible.

**Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!
The Lord has taken away His judgments against you,
He has cleared away your enemies.
The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you will fear disaster no more.
(3:14,15)**

Think for a minute of choices you have made that you regret...of personal weaknesses that cause you and those you love distress...of all that you often intend to do but don't. What aspect of your life do you most connect with a fear of the judgment of God?

Now...this word, "enemies." The fear of whose opinion or approval holds you back, keeps you silent, makes you cower? What parts of *yourself* keep getting in your way, causing you to stumble, giving you grief?

What does it mean to you that the King of Israel is in *your* midst...and that He opens a path before you that is free of his judgment and not dominated by your enemies?

**The Lord your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior.
He will exult over you with joy,
He will be quiet in his love,
He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy. (3:17)**

What are the various images of God this one verse portrays?

When you love someone “quietly” what are you thinking about them?

Think of the wildly exuberant dancing usually associated with a Jewish wedding. Can you picture yourself, the bride in the middle of the circle, and the God of all creation rejoicing over you with shouts of joy? If you sit with that image (or one that God gives you from this verse) how do you feel and what kind of response does it prompt in you?

In the End....

The love of God is quite unlike the human love we've known. No wonder that in those moments when it sinks into our soul...we are loved by God...it feels like a surprise. And so we "let ourselves be loved by God."



Day Six

Living in Fear (Not)

When Jesus speaks to our fears he uses simple language to address our most basic anxieties... what we will eat and what we will wear. What we learn about trusting him on that primal level can change the way we deal with far more complicated worries and fears.

In the Beginning...

In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ describes life in his kingdom. This is what our life is meant to be like...as we live under the King's reign and rule. We are not to be anxious about what we will eat or wear. Even the ravens are provided for by God. And the lilies of the field are clothed better than Solomon in his finest. Luke 12: 22-34)

...do not seek what you shall eat, and what you shall drink, and do not keep worrying. For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. (12: 29,30)

Those who don't know God seek the stuff of life with a kind of frantic desperation. What is it about knowing God as Father that is meant to calm your fears? What would make your experience of life different?

But seek for His kingdom, and these things shall be added to you. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. (12: 31, 32)

How is Jesus saying that your needs will be met?

“Little flock” is a term of endearment. What do you hear in that phrase about the way God sees you and regards your fears?

Every verse in this passage builds to this crescendo: the Father has chosen gladly to give you the Kingdom. What does that verse say to you about the heart of God? How does it calm your fears about matters larger than food or clothing?

Sell your possessions and give to charity; make for yourselves purses which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will be your heart also. (12: 33, 34)

Jesus is saying that our heart will inevitably follow our treasure—it’s the way hearts are. To live a generous life is counter-intuitive to all our inclinations when we are afraid. Fearful people hoard. How do you sense that God is trying to free your heart...by encouraging you to give?

If you applied this same teaching to a non-financial fear (such as loss of relationship or security), what would that look like? How would you live less fearfully...and more generously?

In the End...

It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy,
and He shall be your fear,
and He shall be your dread.

Then He shall become your sanctuary.

Isaiah 8: 13,14



Day Seven

The Greatness of God

One of my favorite verses in the Psalms says this: "From the end of the earth I cry to Thee when my heart is faint, lead me to a rock that is higher than I." (Psalm 61:2 That rock is the greatness of God. To be lifted up above our lives with its worries and challenges...is to be given perspective. *And perspective can change everything.*

In the Beginning...

No one in Scripture seemed to see God from a larger perspective, or wrote more often of his majesty, than the prophet and statesman, Isaiah. You hear his words every year at Christmas: "Let every valley be lifted up and every mountain be made low...then the glory of the Lord will be revealed" (Isaiah 40: 4,5) Follow Isaiah as he leads us to the Rock that is higher than we are. (Isaiah 40: 27-31).

**Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel,
"My way is hidden from the Lord and the justice that is due me escapes the notice of my God?"**

Ah...the universal question that sits at the bottom of our soul. When are you most likely to be asking this question in your own life...and why does this appear to be reality to you?

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.

How does Isaiah describe God? When you and I feel like God does not see what's happening in our lives...what are we missing about the character and nature of God as he truly is?

**He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power.
Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet
those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength;
They will mount up with wings like eagles,
They will run and not get tired,
They will walk and not become weary.**

In this particular passage, the compassion of God is wedded to his greatness. He knows our way...and he gives strength out of his inexhaustible supply, to walk the path we need to walk. Sometimes, we are able to soar. And sometimes, just putting one foot in front of the other with our confidence in him is just as great a victory.

In your life, when have you known the strength of God that enables you to soar?

And when has it been a real victory to just simply be enabled to walk and not grow weary?

Have you been able to count them both as times when you knew the strength of God in your life? Why or why not?

What is it about the greatness of God that is meant to quiet the murmurings of our heart when our path seems take unexpected turns or head steeply uphill?

In the End:

**When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark,
you don't throw away your ticket and jump off the train.
You sit still and trust the engineer.**

Corrie Ten Boom



Day Eight

How Jesus Touches a Life

Imagine what the experience of blindness would have been in Jesus' day—no remedies, no means of support, no future. It was a lifetime of begging from strangers you could not see, taking the tidbits that came your way. Think of your worst moments of feeling trapped and hopeless—and you begin to approach the way the blind man named Bartimaeus lived. But then, he heard that Jesus was coming...

In the Beginning...

This is your opportunity to read a story in the gospels—not for information, but to experience the passage in the present tense and to listen to what God has for you in the story. Read Bartimaeus's story and **let yourself BE this blind man who has waited for this moment for a long time.** He has heard that Jesus is passing through. Somehow in his blindness he has discerned that this man, Jesus, has both power and compassion. For the first time in years, Bartimaeus feels the hope....desperate, clamoring hope. (Mark 5:46-52).

And they came to Jericho. And as He was going out from Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. And when he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!"

And many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage, arise! He is calling for you."

And casting aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. And answering him Jesus said, "What do you want me to do for you? And the blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!"

And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well. And immediately, he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.

As Bartimaeus, what are ways in which you express your tremendous sense of need? What keeps you from just sitting quietly...or shutting up because others are uncomfortable...or giving up?

What do you make of Jesus looking right into the obvious (your need of sight) and asking you the profound question...*what do you want me to do for you?*

How do you feel as you state your response? As you regain your sight?

NOW...think about your own life in the context of this story. You have places in your life that are just this raw and full of longing—where you feel quietly desperate and just as lost. **Pray through this passage in the present tense with a personal pronoun.** “Lord, I am sitting here in my blindness and my need and you are “passing by”. You are here with me...”

When you get to the place where Jesus asks you, “What do you want?” pause...and see what God brings to your mind for you to ask of Him, the Lord of heaven and earth who has loved you from the foundation of the world.

How do you feel when God says to you...*what do you want?*

What’s hard for you in being asked that question...or in forming a response?

What new insight has God given you in this passage...about yourself or your life, or about him and who he really is to you?

In the End:

I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen, not because I see it but because by it, I see everything else.

C.S. Lewis