

1 December

A white-tailed deer drinks from the creek; I want to drink God, deep draughts of God. I'm thirsty for God-alive. I wonder, "Will I ever make it — arrive and drink in God's presence?" I'm on a diet of tears— tears for breakfast, tears for supper. All day long people knock at my door, pestering, "Where is this God of yours?" These are the things I go over and over, emptying out the pockets of my life. I was always at the head of the worshiping crowd, right out in front, Leading them all, eager to arrive and worship, shouting praises, singing thanksgiving—celebrating, all of us, God's feast! Why are you down in the dumps, dear soul? Why are you crying the blues? Fix my eyes on God— soon I'll be praising again. He puts a smile on my face. He's my God. When my soul is in the dumps, I rehearse everything I know of you, From Jordan depths to Hermon heights, including Mount Mizar. Chaos calls to chaos, to the tune of whitewater rapids. Your breaking surf, your thundering breakers crash and crush me. Then GOD promises to love me all day, sing songs all through the night! My life is God's prayer. Sometimes I ask God, my rock-solid God, "Why did you let me down? Why am I walking around in tears,

harassed by enemies?" They're out for the kill, these tormentors with their obscenities, taunting day after day, "Where is this God of yours?" Why are you down in the dumps, dear soul? Why are you crying the blues? Fix my eyes on God— soon I'll be praising again. He puts a smile on my face. He's my God.

- Psalm 42 The Message

Sometimes life can be tough; we've all had days where you think, God where are You? It can then feel like a fight to hang on to HOPE. It's remarkable to see that even at the end of the Psalm, the psalmist is not blaming God, but is still fighting to hang on. His faith is inspiring and his fight valiant, but he is not yet where he wants to be in hope, peace and praise.

There are different ways he responds to the discouragement, that can be helpful to us as well. While asking God the big *why* (*which we all tend to do when life gets tough*), he also actively affirms God's love; he sings and preaches to his own soul, reminding himself of God's character and heart.

We can listen to ourselves, which can bring back problems of yesterday, or we can choose to speak to ourselves— remind ourselves of God's character, faithfulness and goodness when life gets tough. The psalmist also reminisces on specific past experiences he's had with God and expresses his thirst and need for God.

Consider how, regardless of the circumstances, we can adopt this attitude of willfully leaning on God in faith and say, "I will praise you again; you are my help and my God!"



2 December

GOD's loyal love couldn't have run out, his merciful love couldn't have dried up. They're created new every morning. How great your faithfulness! I'm sticking with GOD (I say it over and over). He's all I've got left. GOD proves to be good to the man who passionately waits, to the woman who diligently seeks. It's a good thing to quietly hope, quietly hope for help from GOD. It's a good thing when you're young to stick it out through the hard times. When life is heavy and hard to take, go off by yourself. Enter the silence. Bow in prayer. Don't ask questions: Wait for hope to appear. Don't run from trouble. Take it full-face. The "worst" is never the worst. Why? Because the Master won't ever walk out and fail to return. If he works severely, he also works tenderly. His stockpiles of loyal love are immense. He takes no pleasure in making life hard, in throwing roadblocks in the way.

- Lamentations 3:22-33 The Message

As Christians we need to be reminded that as tough as things may sometimes seem, it is indeed not "the worst" - the worst was already taken to the cross and left there.

Yet still, how often do we wrestle with worry? The constant 'what ifs' that pull us away from peace and calmness and away from God need to be silenced. We're invited to surrender them in prayer and remind ourselves, declare even— that we trust in Him to carry us in whatever storm we're facing.

Where the world is pushing us to analyze and strategize, God is inviting us to rest, abide, and trust in Him, while calmly leaning on Him while we *HOPEfully* wait.

What area of your life is calling you assume the position of silence and prayer and actively waiting on him to show up?

3 December

By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us—set us right with him, make us fit for him—we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus. And that’s not all: We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—out in the wide open spaces of God’s grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.

There’s more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we’re hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we’re never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary—we can’t round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!

Romans 5:1-5 The Message

We are living in the constant tension of the now and the not yet. On the one hand we have been forgiven, justified (declared righteous), and we have both peace with God and access to the Most High; but on the other hand we’re still dealing with our own earthly selves and are faced daily with the decision to either cooperate with the amazing work He’s doing in us - also known as sanctification, or to continue to rely on our own old ways of doing life.

In this tension I invite us all to keep the following thoughts in mind: tough days **will** come, but we can choose to actively cooperate with Him and trust that He will reward our perseverance and obedience with Christlikeness (godly character) and a heart saturated by the Holy Spirit.

Examine the current difficulties in your life and imagine how God is carefully and steadily building and developing your character through it all. What an amazing encouragement to hang on to HOPE, even in the middle of the toughest storms!

5 December

You created me and put me together. Make me wise enough to learn what you have commanded. May those who fear you rejoice when they see me, for I have put my hope in your word.

Psalms 119:73-74 NIV

Pray for wisdom in understanding, discerning and implementing God’s Word; for yourself as well as for any loved one in your life. Consider how the deep seated HOPE you have in His Word can inspire others to, in turn, draw close(r) to Him.

4 December

No one is greater than God. So he made a promise in his own name when he said to Abraham, “I, the Lord, will bless you with many descendants!” Then after Abraham had been very patient, he was given what God had promised. When anyone wants to settle an argument, they make a vow by using the name of someone or something greater than themselves. So when God wanted to prove for certain that his promise to his people could not be broken, he made a vow. God cannot tell lies! And so his promises and vows are two things that can never be changed.

We have run to God for safety. Now his promises should greatly encourage us to take hold of the hope that is right in front of us. This hope is like a firm and steady anchor for our souls. In fact, hope reaches behind the curtain and into the most holy place. Jesus has gone there ahead of us, and he is our high priest forever, just like Melchizedek.

Hebrews 6:13-20 NIV

God's Book is a reliable storehouse of promises—over seven thousand of them. Not just eloquently worded thoughts that make you feel warm all over, but verbal guarantees in writing, signed by the Creator Himself, in which He declares He will do, or will refrain from doing specific things. While some of these promises were given to specific people in specific circumstances, many of them still apply to us today.

Let us take hold of His promises and have the HOPE they inspire be like an anchor for our souls that gives peace and stability.



6 December

I run to you, GOD; I run for dear life. Don't let me down! Take me seriously this time! Get down on my level and listen, and please—no procrastination! Your granite cave a hiding place, your high cliff aerie a place of safety. You're my cave to hide in, my cliff to climb. Be my safe leader, be my true mountain guide. Free me from hidden traps; I want to hide in you. I've put my life in your hands. You won't drop me, you'll never let me down.

I hate all this silly religion, but you, GOD, I trust. I'm leaping and singing in the circle of your love; you saw my pain, you disarmed my tormentors, You didn't leave me in their clutches but gave me room to breathe. Be kind to me, GOD— I'm in deep, deep trouble again. I've cried my eyes out; I feel hollow inside.

Desperate, I throw myself on you: you are my God! Hour by hour I place my days in your hand, safe from the hands out to get me. Warm me, your servant, with a smile; save me because you love me.

What a stack of blessing you have piled up for those who worship you, ready and waiting for all who run to you to escape an unkind world. You hide them safely away from the opposition. As you slam the door on those oily, mocking faces, you silence the poisonous gossip. Blessed GOD! His love is the wonder of the world. Trapped by a siege, I panicked. "Out of sight, out of mind," I said. But you heard me say it, you heard and listened.

Love GOD, all you saints; GOD takes care of all who stay close to him, But he pays back in full those arrogant enough to go it alone.

Be brave. Be strong. Don't give up. Expect God to get here soon.

Psalm 31:1-9, 14-16, 19-24 The Message

At the beginning of the Psalm, David writes that he runs to God for dear life; seeking and expecting refuge and protection. This psalm was written in a time of severe distress and grief. He feels forgotten; he's not having a mere bad day, but is experiencing a long wintery season of distress.... Ever had one of those?

Despite the long and cold season, David had hope in God's Sovereignty, and believed that God would protect His own and be able to bring beauty out of any ash in his life.

David has words of encouragement for us today; see verse 24 where he says be brave, be strong, don't give up and expect God to show up soon.

In what ways can you turn your pleas into praise for God's unfailing love?

7 December

God, the one and only— I'll wait as long as he says. Everything I hope for comes from him, so why not? He's solid rock under my feet, breathing room for my soul, An impregnable castle: I'm set for life.

Psalm 62:5-6 The Message

This statement is said not once but twice in this chapter of Psalms, and with good reason. The Psalmist is reminding himself that God has been trustworthy, is trustworthy and forever shall be. He urges his listeners to have HOPE in the Almighty and not to trust in force or dishonesty or rely on wealth for our wellbeing and peace of mind. And then he concludes with the strong statement that God is proclaiming His own power and kindness and fairness to us.

What concerns or areas of your life need this 2 verse statement to become a prayer to declare to yourself where your HOPE lies? Repeat this prayer, write it out, dwell on it, have it become your innate response whenever we are waiting for God to show up, to intervene, to do a miracle.