

WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE RUNNING AWAY

Psalm 55

(based on a sermon by Rev. Bobby Dagnel, pastor, First Baptist Church, Lubbock)

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One man recalls:

It was a nice Sunday morning after church . My brother and I were playing separately in the back yard. There was a frantic thrashing of bushes that grabbed the attention of us both. Out bounded our dog “Mate,” ferociously shaking a black and white lop-eared rabbit. Mate couldn’t have cared less, but my brother and I knew it belonged to Mrs. Clausen, the widow next door.

There was nothing to do but tell Dad. We knew he had little talent for mending fences, fixing screen doors, or changing spark plugs, but faith and history had taught us that he never encountered a [people] problem that he wasn’t up to. “Everything is simple, don’t panic, don’t get excited. Take a second look at situations,” he used to say. He never knew disappointment, never experienced despair, and he never acknowledged failure (according to the world’s interpretation).

We took our rabbit problem to Dad. He studied it in his usual unconcerned manner and told us not to worry. “Just hose the little fellow off real good so he looks nice and clean. Brush him down with this towel and stick him back in the cage. Mrs. Clausen is still at church. When she comes home and discovers her rabbit, she’ll be a little upset but she’ll figure he just died a natural death.... Oh yes, be sure and tie up [your] dog.”

We did exactly as we were told and then hid in the bushes to get a good vantage point to observe the widow when she noticed her rabbit. Sure enough, just as Dad had promised, we saw her come out the back door and head for the rabbit cages. All of a sudden, we heard the worst screaming you can imagine. Mrs. Clausen went on and on – hollering, shrieking, crying, yelling, and asking God all kinds of questions.

My mom and dad came running out of the house and into her back yard, pleading with her to stop and tell them what had gone wrong. They finally got her to calm down a little and again asked her to explain what had happened. In between sniffs and sobs she finally got it out, “I buried that rabbit three days ago.” (PESep88)

There are some days so bad, we just want to run away.

Patsy Clairmont shares the following true story about her son, Jason. “When he was seven, I sent him off to school one day. A little while later, there was a knock at the door. I opened

the door and there stood Jason. I said, ‘Jason, what are you doing here?’ He said, ‘I’ve quit school.’ I said, ‘Why have you quit school?’ He said, ‘Well, it was too long, it was too hard, and it was too boring.’ I said, ‘Jason, you have just described life. Get back on the bus.’”

There are times when we all want to run away, to quit before we ever really get started, to hop on a train, bus, or plane and run away to some land of beginning again in order to leave all of our troubles, or deadlines, or headaches behind. To drop it all right then and there.

Those times in your life when you are at the end of your rope and you are just not sure how long you can hang on – your muscles ache, your grip is slipping – you need help to come really fast.

Verses 1-8

A prayer that God will not hide himself from the distress, difficulty, and disaster of the psalmist.

The cry is that of one who asks God (verse 1) not to hide himself from the situation of the worshiper.

The criticism, anger, and oppression that he is experiencing is taking its toll on the psalmist’s life. David’s life is filled with anxiety. Here is a man fatigued by the negative emotions of life.

I’ve been there. You’ve been there. Maybe you are there today.

Verses 6-7

Facing his dreadful circumstances, the psalmist was ready to run away.

In one of the Peanuts comic strips, Charlie Brown says, “There’s no problem so big that I can’t run away from it.” (PEMay 88)

That’s always our first impulse – to run, to just get away from the circumstances, to flee and leave the problem for someone else to handle. Some people run away by changing their location. “If I can just move to another town my problems will not follow.” Others try to solve their problems by changing relationships. “If I can just get a new husband or new wife, my disastrous handling of relationships will forever go away.”

But in reality, what we in fact do is transfer our problems to another location, to another relationship.

Others try to run away from life by numbing themselves with drugs or alcohol. Anytime you have a person who has a problem with drugs and alcohol, you can mark it down, what you have is a person trying to run away from life. They are living in a dream world, a fantasyland. They are numbing themselves from the realities of life.

Others try to flee by ending it all. Suicide rates increased 37% between 2000-2018. There is a suicide death every 11 minutes in the U.S. alone. Suicide is another way of trying to call it quits, to run away.

The majority of the time when a person is running away from life – whether literally running away, or running away to a bottle or a pill – almost always it is due to some great disappointment. And it is usually disappointment in a person.

And that is exactly what the psalmist was facing. Greatly disappointed in a trusted friend, feeling the sting of his criticism, the heat of his anger, he says, “I just wish I could run away from life.”

Verse 6 (my paraphrase)

I wish I could be like a dove

to be able to fly away and be at rest.

Like a dove I would nest safely away from the troubles that others cause me

snuggle warmly in the cliffs, above and beyond the storm of confusion and turmoil.

Oh God, things all about me are terrible. Don't leave, oh God. How I wish I could flee from all the difficulties of my life!

How about you? Are you so disturbed that you are seeking to flee from the flagrant flaws of life, trying to run away from the race which makes you so weary?

Lord, give me the wings of a dove.

In Jeremiah, God says,

“Give wings to Moab, that she may flee and get away...

you who dwell in Moab, leave the city and dwell in the rock.

And be like the dove that makes her nest in the side of the cave's mouth.

(Jeremiah 48:9, 28)

Verses 12-14

The psalmist's distress is greatly increased by the unfaithfulness of a trusted friend. The taunts of an enemy would be expected and could be borne with relative ease. But this is grief brought about by a trusted friend – someone with whom the psalmist had gone to worship. A friend at the religious festivals was now the one bringing him hardship and pain.

Verse 22

That word “sustain” means to give divine reinforcement to. It means “to strengthen.” It means “to hold up.” The psalmist says, “When life begins to press me down to the point that I want to run away, I will cast my burdens upon Him – the one that gives divine reinforcement, the one who strengthens, the one who is able to hold me up.

That's a wonderful message. When life presses us down, when we feel like running away, we don't have to go at it alone. God comes to sustain us and strengthen us in the midst of life's difficulties so that we can stand up to it.

How does God sustain us? How does He strengthen us for life? How does He enable us to stand up to life? The psalmist tells us three ways in this last section.

I. God sustains us through frequent and fervent prayer.

Verses 16-17

The psalmist is saying, “Morning, noon, and night – I am going to pray. And through prayer, frequent and fervent prayer, through sweet fellowship with God I will find strength.”

At this point, David gives his own confession of faith, asserting that he will “call upon God and be saved.” Salvation means deliverance from his traitorous enemies. His prayer will be continuous, “evening, morning, and noon.” The verb translated here means “to complain.” And the verb for murmur means “to roar or be boisterous.” David bellows to get God’s attention. “And He shall hear my voice” (verse 17).

Someone has well said that people who pray for miracles usually don’t get miracles. But those who pray for courage, for strength, for endurance to bear the unbearable – those are the ones who most often have their prayers answered. Their prayers help them to tap the hidden reserves of faith and trust.

Daniel, a young man uprooted and taken into Babylonian captivity and placed in Nebuchadnezzar’s court, refused to defile himself. How could a young man remain so faithful and true? Because he sought God’s face. The Bible tells us Daniel made a practice of praying three times a day.

In 1 Kings we have an example of persistent prayer from Elijah. Six times he prayed for rain and six times he sent his servant out to search for signs of rain. He continued to pray, and after seven times the clouds began to roll in.

The secret of Jesus’ life was His frequent and fervent prayer life. He prayed in the mornings and the evenings. When the pressures of His life and ministry were weighing upon Him, He would get away and find strength in prayer.

I think it’s interesting that as the disciples walked with Jesus and observed His life and ministry, they didn’t say, “Lord, show us how to heal the sick. Show us how to raise the dead. Show us how to multiply the loaves and fish.” They said, “Lord, teach us to pray.” And it was because they recognized that the source and strength of Jesus’ ministry was His prayer life.

Paul says we should pray unceasingly. At all times. If we go to God in prayer, He will sustain us. When you are burdened – pray. When you are sick – pray. If you are worried – pray. If you are disappointed – pray. If you are afraid – pray. Pray frequently and fervently. Pray! Pray! Pray! And through it, God will sustain you.

II. God sustains us through inward peace.

Verse 18a

Difficulties will come our way. It is by these difficulties that we grow and mature.

On December 29, 1987, a Soviet cosmonaut returned to the earth after 326 days in orbit. He was in good health, which wasn't always the case in those record-breaking voyages. Five years earlier, touching down after 211 days in space, two cosmonauts suffered from dizziness, high pulse rates, and heart palpitations. They couldn't walk for a week, and after 30 days, they were still undergoing therapy for atrophied muscles and weakened hearts. At zero gravity, the muscles of the body begin to waste away because there is no resistance. To counteract this, the Soviets prescribed a vigorous exercise program for the cosmonauts. They invented the "penguin suit," a running suit laced with elastic bands. It resists every move the cosmonauts make, forcing them to exert their strength. Apparently the regimen works.

We often long dreamily for days without difficulty, but God knows better. The easier our life, the weaker our spiritual fiber, for strength of any kind grows only by exertion. (*Leadership*, Vol. 10, No.2)

But even in our difficulty, God sustains us, gives us inward peace.

How does God strengthen us? Sustain us?

Sometimes He sustains us through life's hardship and difficulties by taking our burden away. We have all gone through our own personal Garden of Gethsemane where we have prayed, "Lord, if it's possible, please let this cup (difficulty) pass from me." And sometimes, in His grace, God has taken that cup away and we don't have to drink from it.

But that's not always the case. In fact, that's not even the usual case. More often than not, He comes in the midst of our trials to give us strength and reinforcements so we are able to stand up to them.

It was Philip Brooks who said, "Do not pray for a task equal to your power, but rather pray for a power equal to your task."

We need to pray, "Oh God, either lighten my burden or strengthen my back." And most often we will discover that God comes to us not to lighten our burdens, but to give strength to our backs that we will be able to stand up to life.

Some would dare say that if you just had enough faith your trials and tribulations would go away. To the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel proprietors I want to ask, "What Bible are you reading?"

Paul writes, "And he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for you: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

III. God sustains us when we focus on the Father.

The psalmist handles his crisis by having full focus. Notice verse 19. “God will hear and answer them, even the one who sits enthroned from old – with whom there is no change.” By having full focus on the Father, the one who sits on the throne, the Psalmist is able to re-orient himself to life. He didn’t have to run, or flee, or fly away. He can focus on God.

Look at verse 22. “Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.”

If your focus is found in being a follower of Jesus, then nothing in life can threaten your identity. As a follower of Jesus, as a disciple of the Rabbi, you are always who you are – no matter what.

For example, if you’re in high school and you played volleyball all through middle school and you don’t make the volleyball team past 9th grade – if your identity is that of an athlete or volleyball player, then you don’t know who you are anymore. The world doesn’t know who you are anymore. But if volleyball was just something you did on the side and being a follower of Jesus is who you really are, then the volleyball coach’s decision can’t take that away.

Or if you find your identity in being his girlfriend or being her boyfriend, and he or she tells you to get lost, take a hike, I’m done – then you don’t know who you are anymore. “I was always known as Hunter’s girlfriend. Now who am I? Hunter is gone.”

If your identity was found in being the first chair violinist in the orchestra and all of a sudden there is a transfer student who is good – no, I mean great – and the next thing you know, you’re sitting second. There’s no crisis. You might be disappointed and you might work harder and try to get back on top, but it hasn’t altered who you really are. Being the best violinist was an aside for your true identity is being a follower of Jesus.

What the Psalmist is saying is, “When terrible things come my way, when my relationships are broken, when enemies overtake me, when I want to run, hide, or fly, I will focus on the Father. I will realize who I really am. I will cast my cares upon the Lord, and He will sustain me.”

If you focus on being a follower of Jesus, there is nothing in life that can rattle who you are, because no one can take that away from you.

After reflection upon circumstances, David decides that a better course of action would be to put the matter into God’s hands. He stepped back from the fury around him, looked up to the Eternal God. And when he caught sight of God, it all looked different. When he thought about God’s power, God’s sovereignty, a God who is ultimately in control, ultimately has the final word, he prayed that God would come and take care of his concerns.

I want you to know that for the rest of your life there is going to be someone trying to change your focus away from the Father. Somebody is going to try to get you to sell out your discipleship.

But the call from the Psalmist is to do the radical thing and follow the Rabbi Jesus. Let Him always be the focus of your heart. And everything else, the Psalmist discovered, will find its place.