

## **“In the Lord I take Refuge” – Seeking God in Times of Trouble**

*Psalm 11; Matt 13:44-50*

When you hear of the attempt to kill Malala Yousafzai, the 15 yr old girl in Pakistan because she wanted nothing more than good education for girls or the horrific gang rape and eventual death of the young woman in India or the cyber bullying that led a young person to commit suicide or closer to home you face difficult times in your life ... sometimes you cry in these times of trouble “where is God?”.

### **The Cry in Times of Trouble**

- ***is God there? Ps 10:1***

<sup>1</sup> Why, Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

I am looking at three Psalms today – 10-12 (Bibles open please), but the ideas, thoughts and questions in these 3 about where is God when times are hard, resonate in many of the Psalms.

- ***injustice abounds Ps 11:2-3***

<sup>2</sup> For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart.

<sup>3</sup> When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?”

In these verses we see expressed a society-wide malaise... maybe lack of justice that seems to be widespread, before which you can feel helpless. <sup>3</sup> When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?”

(In India, there are demonstrations about the way women are treated)

12:1-2

Help, Lord, for no one is faithful anymore; those who are loyal have vanished from the human race. <sup>2</sup> Everyone lies to their neighbor; they flatter with their lips but harbor deception in their hearts.

- personal struggle; physical pain, emotional heartache. The attacks of others on our integrity, or the pain of being misunderstood... all these we know, and at times, we can ask, “where is God?”, “Why is he not acting?”, “why do the unjust do well and those who do right struggle?”.

At some time in our lives we may want to say with the Psalmist in

Psalm 10:12 Arise, Lord! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless!

God may seem distant or is not acting or intervening. The cry is a cry of frustration but also of faith. Why call out to God if you do not believe he is there?

### **The Cry of the non-believer**

If that is the cry of the believer what of the unbeliever? Sometimes it can be their taunts that make things worse...

- ***run, your God will not be with you Ps 11:1***

“Flee like a bird to your mountain...

Here the advice is from someone who does not believe that God can or is interested in intervening.

The only option you have is to flee like a bird to your safe haven.

**Run!**

Run, **you** need to act. Your God will not help you. It is up to you.

**Rely on yourself! You cannot depend on your God.** You must protect yourself from the world, build your own fortress, your own place of safety.

This is the opposite of trust in God and prayer. It is the opposite of Jesus' advice to pray to your heavenly father because he knows you need these things (Matthew 6).

This is the suggestion of the faithless... yet probably the one we are most likely to do in reality, even though we believe in a loving God.

How often do you only pray when things get really bad?! **Then** we ask God for help, or guidance or strength or support? The response to this is to pray and look with the eyes of faith to what God will do.

The blame "where was God when [insert complaint] [for eg ...the twin towers went down?" ] When you ask such a question (and I suspect we all do at some stage of our lives) you need to also, at the end of each day say, "thank you God for keeping me safe today, driving on the road, walking to work, in my home, thank you for the intervention you have made so my children can arrive safely to end of another day". If we want to "blame" God we must also recognise him in our daily preservation and his divine providence.

- ***I can act as I will, God is blind Ps 10:2-11,13***

Another critique mention of God that taunts the believer in these Psalms is to suggest that if you **do** have a God, he is inactive or disinterested.

They then say, "I can act as I like – there is no judgement, no God. If I am strong enough or clever enough I can do what I want – there is no accounting."

Hear how they sneer...

Read Psalm 10:2-11

But the believer has an answer

**The Answer of the Believer**

- ***God is not absent***

10:14

But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless.

11:4 The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord is on his heavenly throne. He observes everyone on earth; his eyes examine them.

- ***God is not silent***

10:17-18

You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,<sup>18</sup> defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.

- ***God will act***

10:12-15

But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless. <sup>15</sup> Break the arm of the wicked man; call the evildoer to account for his wickedness that would not otherwise be found out.

11:6;

On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot.

12:5

<sup>5</sup> "Because the poor are plundered and the needy groan, I will now arise," says the Lord. "I will protect them from those who malign them."

- ***In God I will take refuge 10:14b; 11:1***

The victims commit themselves to you

In the Lord I take refuge.

The other thing the believer does is turn to God for help. We can hardly complain to God if we have not asked him for help, for guidance, for direction, for wisdom except in the difficult times. God **is** gracious, he will respond, but we do well to think about whether we view God as "insurance" when things are bad rather than us being in an ongoing relationship of trust with him.

### **Take the long view**

In Matt 13 Jesus says judgement day **is** coming! There will come a time when God rewards the righteous, those who entrust themselves to him, and wipe the sneer from the face of those who ruin the lives of others for their own reward.

Ps 10:16

<sup>16</sup>

The Lord is King for ever and ever; the nations will perish from his land.

Ps 11:7

<sup>7</sup>

For the Lord is righteous, he loves justice; the upright will see his face.

The person of faith leaves the long term to God. We are like wisps of wind, the chaff that blows away, the flower that wilts so quickly in the summer heat... and so we find it hard to see our circumstances with the long view, the long term.

Amidst the worries and struggles of this life, the injustice that may be evident, we, who live for such a short time need to stop and see things with the long term view, the view of our God. It may not seem as satisfying for us that God is the one who will bring about justice, but we do know that the ungodly will face him in judgement – the ungodly that Jesus came to save if they repent. But if there is no repentance, then they will have to face him and judgement will come, if not in this life, then in the next. And if justice *cannot* come in this life but in the next, and "the upright will see his face", then in that, we should be content.

### ***Worried***

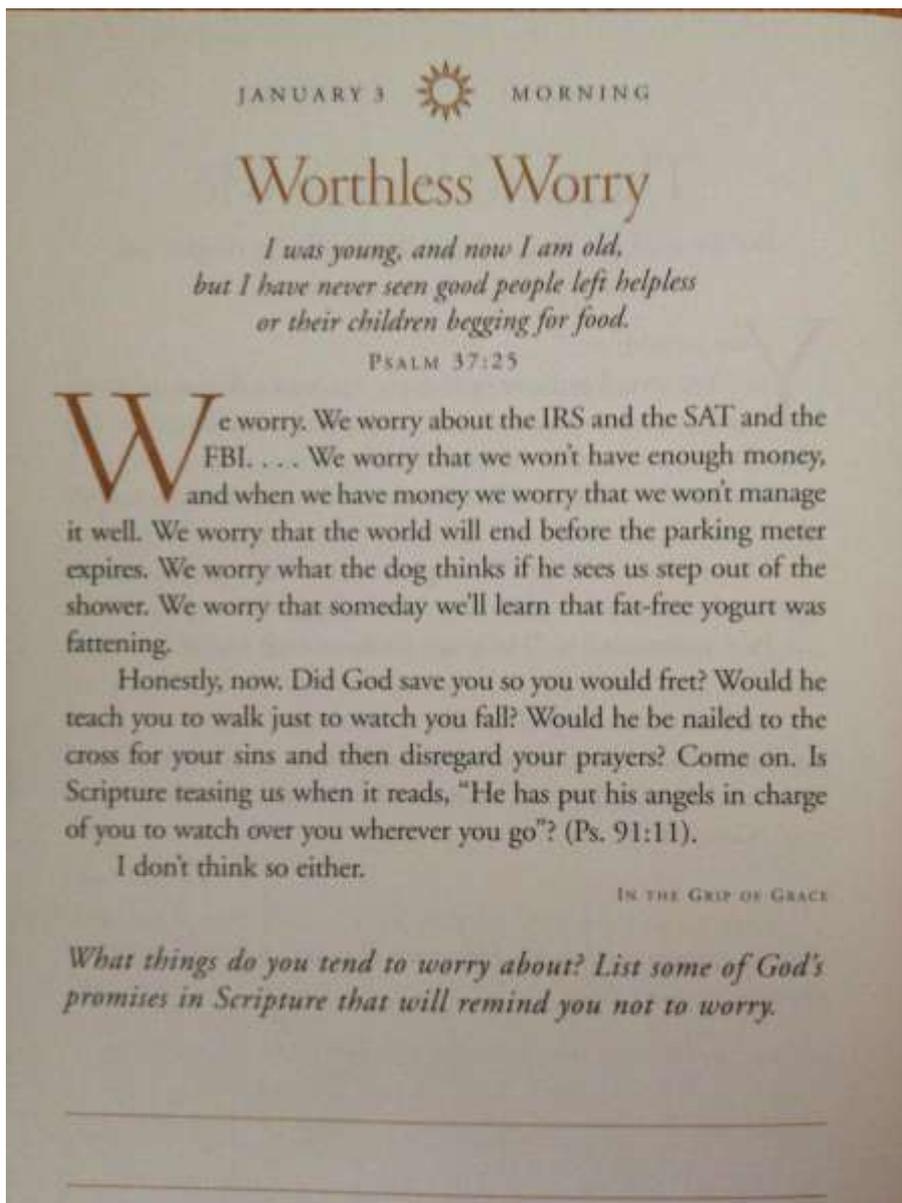
Me, this past week. Worried (unusual for me actually). Worried I think, about the year ahead – about the challenges for evangelism and discipleship, about our finances, for our church.

Worried about the needs of the people I am trying to pastor and care for.

Can I do it?

Can I, with God's grace and all of us exercising our gifts of course, lead, grow our community into a cohesive, caring, God-loving group of people that are confident in Jesus and love to talk about their faith...?

And as I was pondering this and the way I was feeling I read from a set of morning and evening readings that Lee-Ann had given me for Christmas by Max Lucado called *Grace for the Moment*, Jan 3, entitled "Worthless Worry"...



**Yes, run!**

Flee like a bird to your mountain... says the unbeliever?

The proud will not lower themselves to need anyone. The atheist has no-one to call out to or run to.

I would say "Yes, flee, run".

I will run, but in faith and trust I will run **towards** the arms of a loving God who loves to hear my prayers, sometimes lets me endure pain and suffering for my growth and his glory. Run, to him who holds his arms open as wide as the cross.

**Amen**

### **Psalm 10**

New International Version (NIV)

1 Why, Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?  
2 In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises.  
3 He boasts about the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the Lord.  
4 In his pride the wicked man does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.  
5 His ways are always prosperous; your laws are rejected by<sup>[b]</sup> him; he sneers at all his enemies.  
6 He says to himself, "Nothing will ever shake me." He swears, "No one will ever do me harm."  
7 His mouth is full of lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue.  
8 He lies in wait near the villages; from ambush he murders the innocent. His eyes watch in secret for his victims;  
9 like a lion in cover he lies in wait. He lies in wait to catch the helpless; he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net.  
10 His victims are crushed, they collapse; they fall under his strength.  
11 He says to himself, "God will never notice; he covers his face and never sees."  
12 Arise, Lord! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless.  
13 Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself, "He won't call me to account?"  
14 But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless.  
15 Break the arm of the wicked man; call the evildoer to account for his wickedness that would not otherwise be found out.  
16 The Lord is King for ever and ever; the nations will perish from his land.  
17 You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,  
18 defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.

### **Psalm 11**

1 In the Lord I take refuge. How then can you say to me: "Flee like a bird to your mountain."  
2 For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart.  
3 When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?"  
4 The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord is on his heavenly throne. He observes everyone on earth; his eyes examine them.  
5 The Lord examines the righteous, but the wicked, those who love violence, he hates with a passion.

<sup>6</sup> On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot.  
<sup>7</sup> For the Lord is righteous, he loves justice; the upright will see his face.

### **Psalm 12**

<sup>1</sup> Help, Lord, for no one is faithful anymore; those who are loyal have vanished from the human race.

<sup>2</sup> Everyone lies to their neighbor; they flatter with their lips but harbor deception in their hearts.

<sup>3</sup> May the Lord silence all flattering lips and every boastful tongue—

<sup>4</sup> those who say, "By our tongues we will prevail; our own lips will defend us—who is lord over us?"

<sup>5</sup> "Because the poor are plundered and the needy groan, I will now arise," says the Lord. "I will protect them from those who malign them."

<sup>6</sup> And the words of the Lord are flawless, like silver purified in a crucible, like gold<sub>[e]</sub> refined seven times.

<sup>7</sup> You, Lord, will keep the needy safe and will protect us forever from the wicked,  
<sup>8</sup> who freely strut about when what is vile is honored by the human race.

### **Matthew 13:44-50**

<sup>44</sup> "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

<sup>45</sup> "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. <sup>46</sup> When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

<sup>47</sup> "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. <sup>48</sup> When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. <sup>49</sup> This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.