

“Callings All Around: Called In Suffering”

Psalm 22:1-2, 19, 22, 24

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It was back in the 1990's. My heart, head and body were not in sync. I had faith, I knew God, and yet I didn't "feel" God. My soul heavy. My body weak. My emotions raw.

I thought I knew that Jesus loved me; I kept telling myself that He did, but I didn't feel it. When was I going to be better? Oh, God, how long?

I prayed, but to me my prayers only went as high as the ceiling.

This was back in the day of CD music. Some may remember the WOW CD's of top Christian music. As I was self-secluded in my room, I would often play a popular contemporary Christian song from 1994. It was a song by Twila Paris called "God is In Control." In that song were lyrics that I needed to hear over and over again.

God Is in Control by Twila Paris

This is no time for fear
This is a time for faith and determination
Don't lose the vision here
Carried away by the motion

Hold on to all that you hide in your heart
There is one thing that has always been true
It holds the world together
God is in control
We believe that His children will not be forsaken
God is in control
We will choose to remember and never be shaken
There is no power above or beside Him, we know
God is in control

He has never let you down
Why start to worry now? (2x)
He is still the Lord of all we see
And He is still the loving Father
Watching over you and me

During that time of depression, I so desperately wanted to "get better," and because I like things on a schedule (as a Methodist, I like things Methodical, after all), I wanted to know WHEN I was going to get better. Timing was out of my hands.

At the time I certainly did not realize a “calling” in my suffering. Now that I am beyond those days, I can see how there can be a calling even in times of depression, trials, suffering, and grief.

Now there are different type of sufferings. It’s kind of like 2 people talking and one begins to tell their tale of woe and the other one says, “You think that’s bad, listen to this...” **(image)**



We should not minimize anyone’s suffering. Everyone responds differently.

For us today in helping us shape a culture of calling is figuring out God’s call in the place you are in. God what are you calling me to in this current circumstance? God what are you calling me to in this suffering?

In this Psalm of lament, David cries out: **¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? ² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.**

Jesus Himself felt this way and on the cross cried out and repeated Psalm 22:2, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46)

I was with someone in the past month. The person was struggling. The person looked me right in the eye, with a glare that was penetrating and was crying out for answers, and asked me, “What did I do?” In other words, what did I do to deserve this? Is God punishing me? A raw and real emotional moment.

In our church wide book study, we will be starting in September on the book, “The Stories We Live, Finding God’s Calling All Around Us,” by Kathleen A. Cahalan you will find the story of Anna (page 92). Anna had been diagnosed with Lou Gehrig’s disease. She said, “I hated God. For months after my diagnosis of ALS, I couldn’t go to church, or listen to anyone tell me that ‘God only give us what we can handle.’ That was not a God I wanted to know. I was losing everything in my life as I’d known it. If God gave me this disease thinking I can handle it, God wrong.”

God is big enough to handle your anger. He is big enough to hear you question Him and ask, “God is this fair?” “God why?” Why would an all loving God allow such pain and suffering?

This Psalm of lament shows us that this crying out in itself is actually a prayer to God. **¹⁹ But you, LORD, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me.**

Why doesn't God deliver me from what I want? God I'm asking with pure motives.

Also, in Cahalan's book on Calling you will find Maria saying this (pages 95-96), "I begged God every day, and then I reminded God that he is God and should act like it! I even bargained with God, promising to go to church if I could just get through this."

²² I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you. Oh, but sometimes it is hard to praise. The book, 'Stories We Live,' puts it this way, "In suffering, you can move from seeking explanations about God to finding God...trust that God remains with you and you remain with God, no matter your circumstances. For many the insight that God never abandons them despite their misery pushes their faith to a new place." (page 96)

Many of you are probably familiar with a poem that has been around for many years now. It is called "Footprints in the Sand." The basis is that when there was only one set of footprints in the sand it was because times were rough and Jesus was carrying you. Well, I found a new twist that I think is appropriate here:



We don't want to suffer. What is God's calling in this place and time of suffering?

Cahalan says, "We may never find an answer to why we suffer, but we may find meaning in it." (page 100)

Deuteronomy 31:6 New International Version (NIV) ⁶ Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

Yes, faith in a God who never leaves us in our time of pain, sorrow, grief, loneliness, and suffering.

Betsy Richie was a housekeeper for John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement. She was there at his bedside the last days of his life. She wrote this:

"...some of those who were most used to hear our dear Father's dying voice would be able to interpret his meaning; but though he strove to speak we were still unsuccessful: finding we could not understand what he said, he paused a little, and then with all the remaining strength he had, cried out, 'The best of all is, God is with us'; and then, as if to assert the faithfulness of our promise-keeping Jehovah and comfort the hearts of his weeping friends, lifting up his dying arm in token of victory and raising his feeble voice with a holy triumph not to be expressed, again repeated the heart-reviving words, "The best of all is, God is with us!"

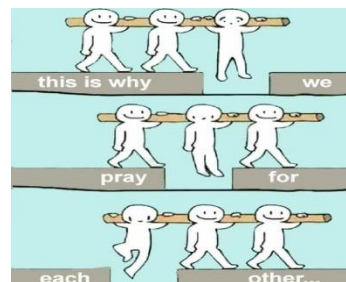
The Journal of John Wesley, ed., Percy Livingstone Parker, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press), 419

In our suffering---God is present.
 In our depression---God is present.
 In our grief---God is present.

²⁴ For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.

Oh beloved, He does indeed hear.

One of the things we need to be doing is praying for one another in need. I found an image I wanted to share with you.



At some point, someday, unexpectedly...it will be our time. Our time of suffering, our time of pain, our time of need. Galatians 6:2 New International Version (NIV) ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.

But in line with this image hear these words from the Message Bible: Ephesians 6:18: Pray for your brothers and sisters. Keep your eyes open. Keep each other's spirits up so that no one falls behind or drops out.

You are carrying them through prayer. You are carrying them through caring for them.

With all the emotions we experience when we are suffering, we need to hear on those clear and good days and be gently reminded on those days that aren't so good that we are still in God's hands. He is the potter we are the clay. He is faithful. He has never failed us. He will not forsake us or leave us alone. His promises still stand. *The best of all is, God is with us.*

Beloved, we are going to have a time of prayer. You may be suffering in some way. You may be asking why. You may be trying to find your calling in this place called suffering. You may want to pray for one another. Pray for one who you know to be suffering. You may be a caregiver that needs extra strength and prayers right now.

During the song you are invited to come forward, here at the steps, at the kneelers, or in the front pews. Also, there is going to be the opportunity to be anointed with oil.

Now something that is very popular right now is Essential Oils. Aromatherapy. Lemon oil, lavender oil, fennel, peppermint, etc. But friends, I want to share with you THE Essential Oil. To be anointed in the name of The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Anointing with oil is a Biblical request for blessing. It is a sign of and reminder of God's presence with you. It is not magical, but a reminder that through the power of the Holy Spirit a portion of hope and the healing love of God is upon you.

As those with the anointing oil go to their stations and as we sing this last song, may those that desire to do so come be anointed, pray, and have the assurance that the *best of all is---God is with us.*