

# OUR HELP

DEVOTIONS ON STRUGGLE,  
VICTORY, LEGACY

JOYCE DINKINS AND  
DIANE PROCTOR REEDER,  
GENERAL EDITORS



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*Our Help: Devotions on Struggle, Victory, Legacy*

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# GENIUS

DIANE PROCTOR REEDER

*No, O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.*

MICAH 6:8

Often think about our enslaved ancestors and the genius behind their ability to learn the language of their oppressors, and then learn “their” Bible . . . and then, miraculously, take that book meant for their oppression and turn it into a tool for liberation. Let’s take a realistic and thoughtful look at how that transformation occurred. For example, they were spoon-fed the verse, “Slaves, obey your earthly masters” (Ephesians 6:5), but then somehow God led them to Exodus and the story of how He told Moses to demand freedom from Egyptian rule for his people, the Hebrews. They were spoon-fed the verse about obeying “authorities” (Hebrews 13:17 NIV), but then they heard the story of how Jesus turned over tables in the Temple because He saw money-grubbing and thievery (see Matthew 21:12–13).

And then it hits me: these people searched the Scriptures for themselves. They often had to do it surreptitiously, as the penalty to slaves for learning to read could be severe beating, even death. Yet, they uncovered the untold stories of the Old and New Testaments.

They heard and read verses about God being just: “And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him?” (Luke 18:7 KJV). About mercy: “Let us fall

now into the hand of the LORD, for his mercies are great” (2 Samuel 24:14 KJV). They found themselves drawn to the God who was “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Hebrews 4:15 KJV). They were obedient to the command to “comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Corinthians 1:4 KJV).

They must have searched diligently. They must have searched faithfully. They must have searched extensively to find those precious verses and make for themselves a protective covering for their spirits, a covering given by God the Holy Spirit who indwelt them as they discovered the gospel message for themselves and then began to “work hard to show the results of [their own] salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear” (Philippians 2:12).

This is a *Selah* moment for me, a time to pause in awe of God and to think about what it took for these people who were so acted upon, so denigrated, yet were still able to learn, interpret, and apply Scripture to their harsh realities. It is a challenge moment for me to do the same thing, in God’s strength.

#### REFLECTION:

How does this history inform your own desire to seek out the Scriptures and uncover their relevance for you today?

*Suggested Scripture Reading:* Exodus 9; Philippians 2:12

# SINGING INTO BATTLE

PATRICIA RAYBON

*David replied to the Philistine, “You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of Heaven’s Armies—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.”*

I SAMUEL 17:45

I’m spending a Saturday morning on YouTube, listening to spiritual songs created by slave ancestors I’ll never personally know. But I know their songs. Work songs. Praise songs. Solace songs. Healing songs. Singing these songs helped our forebears endure the worst of life—brutal capture, overwork, half-starvation, enforced poverty. Faced with this Goliath, they opened their mouths despite the pain and they sang. In cotton fields, rice paddies, sugarcane fields, brush arbors, and bayou backwaters; in blistering heat and bitter cold. Then to aid escape, they sang “signal songs”—“Wade in the Water,” “Go Down, Moses,” and other spirituals—to point themselves toward freedom.

Thus, they were like David, the singing shepherd boy. He defeated the Philistine Goliath—not with heavy armor or iron weapons, but first by opening his mouth. Declaring the glory of his conquering God, David said to Goliath: “You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of Heaven’s Armies—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied” (1 Samuel 17:45).

Added David: “This is the LORD’s battle and he will give you to us!” (v. 47).



I'm reminded of this while helping my husband, Dan, face multiple health challenges. His battle feels heavy some days because I struggle, as his wife, to stay ahead of my own work schedule while also going with him to doctor's appointments, picking up prescriptions, cooking meals, keeping house, and offering prayers and support. "Some days," I said to Dan recently, "it feels like we're fighting a giant Goliath."

As soon as I spoke, however, I thought of David—and of singing—and especially of a recent visit that Dan and I made to one of North America's greatest sites of singing, Fisk University. It wasn't a planned stop. We were visiting Nashville when relatives suggested we tour the Civil Rights Room at the downtown public library. While there we watched a film about young civil rights activists—Fisk students jailed for protesting, but who sang throughout the battle. Inspired by their courage, we made our way to Fisk and its Jubilee Hall. There we viewed a gorgeous mural of the original Fisk Jubilee Singers—who helped save their beloved school. How? They sang.

That, indeed, is what I'm doing this Saturday morning. Singing. Pretty loud, in fact. And so should you. When troubles come, don't pick up a heavy weapon. Just open your mouth. Then ignite God's power with praise.

#### REFLECTION:

What's your favorite spiritual or gospel song to sing? Take a few minutes now—and sing it!

*Suggested Scripture Reading:* 1 Samuel 17:41–47;  
2 Chronicles 20:21–24

# THANKS FOR WAITING

MICHAEL T. WESTBROOK

*Lazy people are soon poor; hard workers get rich.*

PROVERBS 10:4

When you walked into the office waiting room of Progressive Cab, you were greeted with this logo-sign on the wall above the counter: “Thanks for Waiting 22 Years.” On the counter itself was a box of giveaways for customers; pencils and pens carrying the cab company logo statement.

Anyone inquiring about the meaning of the logo heard Mr. Dickins, the owner, proudly tell his story. As an African American who started his cab business in a small suburban community, he had had to overcome many obstacles to get started—and to keep his company going while trying to take care of his family. It took decades!

Starting with one car, an office in a back alley, and a telephone, his continued effort and perseverance paid off. Eventually, he owned a fleet of fifteen cars with drivers operating from six o’clock a.m. until midnight, and an office with waiting room located inside the town’s train station.

Paul the apostle admonishes all Christ-followers, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9 NIV). Paul is telling us that if we keep going in spite of any obstacles that we may encounter, there is a time already set aside to receive our reward. He speaks here about “doing good” in the faith, but the principle still holds. *All hard work brings a profit*, God tells us through King Solomon (Proverbs 14:23 NIV). That’s refreshing news to those of us who are in the

midst of heavy burdens and challenges that life throws at us. Even when it gets so hard and it doesn't seem like we can take another step, we know that there is a reward coming. Whether we are working to provide for our families or working in our communities and churches, the principle holds. The reward may be material. The reward may be spiritual. But there *will* be a reward!

As believers we face many things as we attempt to run this Christian race and it can become tiring. Don't give up because there is a reward waiting for those that don't grow weary. So if you're working real hard to sow into a business, ministry, or other venture that just seems like it will never get where you want it to be, keep on working at it with the anticipation of hanging your own "sign on the wall." The only question you need to ask is, "What will my sign say?"

#### REFLECTION:

Write down what you would like your "sign" to say when you get to where you believe God is taking you.

*Suggested Scripture Reading:* Psalm 27:14; Proverbs 10:4; Isaiah 40:31