

At Wits' End

Have you ever been to your wits end? The Bible tells us, *“They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end”* (Psalm 107:27). I love this Hebrew phrase. Biblical scholarship says “at their wits' end” literally means: “all their wisdom is swallowed up.” This makes sense because the passage is referring doing business in great waters, God's wonders in the deep, the raising of the stormy wind and waves, their soul suffering emotional “melt down,” until finally coming to their wits' end (Psalm 107:23-27). The Psalmist is saying, all my wisdom and innovative ideas for escape are being swallowed up like a water spout sucking everything into its black, watery hole along with my ship! The Brown, Driver, Briggs definitions in Hebrew of “wits' end” gives even more detail: **wits:** חִכְמָה: chokmâh: 1) wisdom 1a) skill (in war) 1b) wisdom (in administration) 1c) prudence (in religious affairs); **end:** בָּלַע: bâla' to destroy: cover, destroy, devour, eat up, be at end, spend up, swallow down (up). Allow me to give this statement what we at Christchurch call “Pope's paraphrase” of Psalm 107: 27: “I am blinded by this raging storm. My feet cannot find footing and I am falling down without traction like a man under the influence. I am in complete disorientation. On top of this, the skills I once had like a soldier for tactics is gone, my ability “to connect the dots” in an orderly fashion has vanished, and it's difficult to know what is the right thing to do. I am pulled down so low I cannot fight the downward spiral. The gravity that holds me is stronger than the lift all my wits together can supply!” Have you ever been there; are you there now? Let's meditate for a few minutes on what we might do when we are at our “wits' end.”

I. Find the Compass.

One of the first casualties in the spiral downward is a great sense that you've lost your direction. There is a new movie coming out geared for children, entitled “the Golden Compass.” Even secular critics are saying the author of the series of books, which is the dynamo driving force behind this movie, is making a direct assault against the writings of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. In his journey, the author finds his direction by the scientific approach using a golden compass representing “truth.” This truth is in opposition to the “senile, out-of-date god” of the story. By the way, the God of all order invented all the creation the scientists study. To the honest and believing scientist, there are no contradictions, but in actuality, there is confirmation for the validity of both. It is the unbelievers that set one at variance against the other. How sad that this story is aimed for children as well as adults. So it is this year's attempt by the atheist for a “Christmas story.” You and I well know that Christmas without Christ doesn't work.

It is a lie to think you can find truth and direction without God. *“In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths”* (Proverbs 3:6). And where are the ways of God recorded? The Bible! *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path”* (Psalm 119:105). Notice this natural, contextual segue into directional delight: *“As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trust in him. For who is God, save the LORD? and who is a rock, save our God? God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect”* (II Samuel 22:31-33). God's way is perfect, so when I lift up the light His Word in obedience, He makes my way perfect! God's Word is the true golden compass! *“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver”* (Proverbs 25:11).

II. Find a Friend.

Not just any friend! The wrong friend can steer you wrong. Amnon's trouble that led to immorality and eventually death started with the wicked influence of the wrong friend: *“But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah David' brother: and Jonadab was a very subtle man”* (II Samuel 13:3).

A. Find a friend that brings out (to use Lincoln's terminology), “the better angels of our nature.” *“Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend”* (Proverbs 27:17). I want a friend

that makes me a better me! I need a friend that brings Jesus out in me.

B. Find a good, old friend. We have a tendency to gravitate toward those people we believe will get us ahead in this world we are living in. If these friends follow the principle of "*seek ye first the kingdom of God*" (Matthew 6:33) then you will be blessed by union with them. If Jesus is not first with them, beware of weaving your life into theirs! Rehoboam got into the wrong direction as a young king for neglecting the counsel of the older and wiser men with experience, who were fiends and advisers to Solomon. We see it in these words: "*But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him*" (I Kings 12:8). This unwise course of action split the kingdom. Rehoboam needed a good, old friend: "*Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not...*" (Proverbs 27:10).

C. Find a faithful friend. "*A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity*" (Proverbs 17:17). Some of my favorite words in American history come from the winter of Valley Forge when Washington's men were staining the snows with their blood for freedom's fight. Thomas Paine with pathos said two days before Christmas, 1776 said, "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly; it is dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price on its goods; and it would be strange indeed, if so celestial an article as Freedom should not be highly rated." Freedom rides the back of committed friendships. When you ask a veteran who has been in the field of fire, what is going through his mind during the conflict, the most often heard comment I have heard or read is something to the effect, "I watch my buddy's back and I know he has mine." If he is not watching your back, you don't have a true friend. I would place a faithful friend in Paine's category of "a celestial article." He's the real deal; keep him by your side!

III. Find God's Face.

Returning to the thoughts of our text with the harrowing dark night of a storm at sea, I am reminded of one of my favorite stories from this genre. The landlubbers were huddled in the bottom center of the ship as she reeled to and fro. The fear was escalating and panic had set in. The question of what are they going to do was the consensus. One leader of the panic-stricken passengers climbed the ladder to the deck. He lifted up the hatch fighting the wind to keep it from blowing it off its hinges, and spied the captain in the faint light of the nearly extinguished lantern. The captain, holding manfully to the wheel, spotted him and smiled at the worried passenger. The man sighed deeply, closed the hatch, went below and informed his fellow passengers he was returning to bed, for he had seen the face of the captain and all is well. "*And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved*" (Genesis 32:30). Let me contrast this with the words of a stewardess as our plane was preparing for emergency landing. A young girl began to get very loud in her worried state. The girl said to the stewardess, "Ma'am, I've never been in an emergency landing!" In a high frantic voice the stewardess answered, "Neither have I!" The effect of the stressed-out stewardess was chilling.

What comfort we find in these inspired words, "*When thou sadist, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek*" (Psalm 27:8). I love the words that a man wrote to his Boy Scout son to whom he had given a compass. "Jack, when you know your direction, you'll never be lost." Let us look to the face of God; we'll never be lost when He, who holds the east, west, south and north in His hand, is in control.

- Pastor Pope -

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