

In the Midst of the Fray

Psalm 91 Devotionals

Phyllis Nissila



“Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.” (Psalm 91:14)

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Citations and Acknowledgements

~ All of the devotionals appear as individual posts on my blog:
<https://pnissila.wordpress.com/category/psalm-91-devotionals/>

They have been reformatted and revised for this publication which is free for downloading for personal or group study only and may not be sold.

~ All Scripture references are from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

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May the Lord bless and encourage you as you read of His love, protection, and provision in the verses of Psalm 91.

Phyllis Nissila, December, 2013

Introduction

I woke up the other day and turned on the news to this: “And we have no idea as of yet,” the nuclear energy expert said, her voice tense, “the full impact and far-reaching damage of the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster...”

I tried another radio station and heard: “And economic advisers are predicting the financial fiasco may be just months away...”

One more attempt to get some news, a weather forecast maybe—I’d settle for a mattress commercial at this point—revealed: “The United Nations is forming a plan to ‘save earth from killer asteroids’” (Really).

So much bad news and I’m not even out of bed yet.

I turned off the radio.

Immediately, bits and pieces of [Psalm 91](#) came to mind:
“...Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare...” (3)

“...under his wings you will find refuge...” (4)

And “He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble...” (15).

Okay, Lord. This looks like a Psalm 91 kind of day, I thought. And I decided that before I let all the current troubles fester in my consciousness

I'd open the Bible to the famous "help in hard times" Psalm and read through from verse 1 to the end.

And so I did.

And it was good.

(Picture shoulders easing down from ears as tension slowly recedes...)

And it occurred to me that I could offer like comfort and encouragement to others.

What follows, in installments, is a walk through Psalm 91 that I hope for you, too, will provide some peace and strength in the midst of the fray, for the coming days may get a lot worse before they get a lot better.

Here's the first installment.

Be fortified.

The Sturdy Oak

Psalm 91:1-2



He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust."

When I was a kid one of my favorite pastimes was climbing a certain tree in the front yard. I loved the view from high up and the protection from stray dogs, rivaling sibs, and other trouble "on the ground."

I loved the sounds of the tree as I nestled in its sturdy branches, leaves bristling in the breeze. I felt peaceful and safe there. And it was a cool place in the hot, humid, Midwest summers.

I picture a dwelling place with God as also being high up and peaceful like my perch in the branches of the old oak. I picture a refuge "in the shadow of the Almighty" to be refreshing, too.

But mostly, I picture the "shelter of the Most High" to be a place of safety, away from the fray.

Trouble may clamor beneath, or over there, or in the rumblings of war machines far or near, but in the dwelling place of God, wherein we are invited to spend time, indeed to remain, we can find rest.

For like that sturdy oak, God is not moved.

Invitation

Write about a time God was a “refuge” (stronghold, strength, fortress, defense, trust) for you.

What *He* Says

Psalm 91:3



Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence."

My friend Paula told me this story about her uncle, known in her extended family as "Crazy Uncle," until, that is, after his wife died.

His wife, Paula says, could slay you in short order with her caustic tongue, and she left no relative untouched.

While Auntie aimed her verbal barbs at whoever was present, Crazy Uncle usually sat silently, absorbed in his own world. He rarely interacted with anyone. After her passing, however, he seemed to recover from his odd behavior. He visited relatives more and engaged in quite normal conversations. "Well, hello Paula," he would now say when greeting my friend. "It's so nice to see you!"

A dramatic change.

Paula's no-longer-crazy uncle's transformation after Auntie's death left some family members wondering if his wife's constant criticisms and put-downs had something to do with his previous condition...

Psalm 91:3 deals with salvation from "fowlers" (entrappers, entanglers) and "pestilences" (plagues) which come in all genres including what we now know

as verbal abuse, such as the behavior Paula's aunt engaged in. And this type of abuse, therapists tell us, is often more difficult to overcome because though "verbal bruises" are unseen, they still wreak considerable havoc—on the mind, emotions, soul, and spirit.

I do not know where Paula's uncle got the strength to overcome the effects of his wife's demeaning tirades, whether it was his faith in God or simply due to a life now free of a critical spirit.

But I do know that whatever plagues *us*, be it physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual in nature, and however much it might increase in the days ahead, we needn't be downcast. For we have God's reassurance, as noted in the verse above, that "he will save..." for, He says elsewhere—and directly to each of us—, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness" (Jeremiah 31:3).

And what *He* says over rides the accuser—for eternity.

Listen.

Regain your strength.

And let the healing begin.

Invitation

Write about a time God delivered or restored you.

First Line of Defense

Psalm 91:4



He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

You have no doubt heard some variation of the much-used sermon illustration about a little child whose daddy told him to trust in God for protection one stormy night. However, the boy was looking for a little more tangible evidence of safety. As the story goes, the child preferred God “with skin on” so he could see and feel His protection.

In a sense, skin is perhaps the most apt tangible illustration of the kind of protection God *does* provide for us.

The body’s largest organ, known as our “first line of defense” protects us from assault with objects, the extremes of temperature, and disease. Without the protection of our skin which literally surrounds us, we would be vulnerable to a host of ills.

Consider likewise the “covering” the Body of Christ has: God’s promises threaded throughout Scripture, intercessory prayers, the gifts of the Holy Spirit for healing, miracles, direction, and deliverance, and the fellowship of other believers for additional kinds of assistance.

God’s protection detailed in His Word and made possible by the sacrifice of His Only Son, Jesus, the Word Made Flesh (God “with skin on,” you might put

it) is much more comprehensive than walls of brick and stone or even this magnificent skin in which we live and move.

His protection is our first—and always—line of defense, a “shield” against enemies both seen and unseen who will not, in the end, prevail. Read the last chapter.

And keep this in mind: “God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

Invitation

Write about a time God protected or provided in some way for you or a loved one.

Through It All, Big and Small

Psalm 91:5-6



You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.

Whoa.

According to verses 5 and 6, if it isn't terrors it's arrows and pestilence and plagues ("Oh, my!"), and if one reads through Revelation sometimes the mayhem, muck, and misery comes at us *all at once!*

Not only that, if all the fearsomeness isn't bad enough at midday (cue the *Jaws* theme), *just wait until dark!*

But besides big-ticket trouble, there is plenty of small stuff that garners grief. Fortunately, the same God Who provides the shield or covering referenced in the previous devotional also provides a "small shield," or "buckler" (as it is referenced in the KJV), for the "hand-to-hand combat" of daily difficulties.

Good thing, too.

More often than not, our battles are not of biblical proportion; they are the relentless pokes and prods the "enemy" uses to make us turn from the truth of Who God is and the truth of whom *we* are. And, like "the little foxes"

attempting to “destroy the vine,” (Song of Solomon 2:15), these little barbs can also dishearten and discourage.

But whether the onslaught is catastrophic or chronic there is Someone Who is awake and on call 24/7, Who, as Psalm 121:4 indicates, “neither slumbers nor sleeps.”

He knows about the prophesied Big Events and the daily dilemmas. He is Jehovah-Jireh: the Lord Who provides, Who “sees to it” [1], Who sees to us.

Here is “some shield and buckler,” courtesy of God’s Word, for what you may face today:

“Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17, AKJV).

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all” (Psalm 34:19, NASB).

The battle is the Lord’s (see 2 Chronicles 20:15; 1 Samuel 17:47; Ephesians 6:12; and 2 Chronicles 32:7 for historical and personal encouragement).

Invitation

Write about a time God provided for you.

[1] <https://bible.org/seriespage/compound-names-jehovah-jireh-rapha-nissi-session-60>

One + one = Victory

Psalm 91:7-8



A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.

There is strength in numbers, the old saying goes. And if the big numbers refer to “the bad guys” there can be intimidation, fear, and foreboding in the camp of the (fewer) “good guys.”

But despite the odds of various types and forms of turmoil—physical, mental, emotional, and/or spiritual—consider the power of One (god) + one (believer) in the chronicles of the redeemed: Abraham, Sarah, Noah, Deborah, David, Abigail, Peter, and Mary, the mother of Jesus [1].

What did our forefathers and foremothers in the faith know? As St. Paul put it: “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 11:23).

Our forebears also understood “God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline (sound-mindedness)” (2 Timothy 1:7).

That goes for us in the here and now, too. Sometimes it does boil down to merely one believer. At other times, it may be just a few, a remnant.

Here is another story from antiquity of two facing great (big, tall, and menacing) odds that offers encouragement.

Two Scouts

When the Israelites neared the end of their encampment in the desert, Moses sent twelve scouts to explore the Promised Land. After forty days, they returned with some good news, the land was fertile, and some bad news: the cities were large and fortified and the people, especially the Nephilim [2], were large.

Hulking large.

And mean.

As the scouts put it: “We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them” (Numbers 13:32).

“That night,” the text continues, “all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. [...] “If only we had died in Egypt!” they moaned. “Or in this desert! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword?” (14:2-3).

Even after everything the people had experienced—the parting of the Red Sea, the daily provision of manna and quail, water coming from a rock, the cloud by day, fire by night—they were afraid, ready to run from the very entrance to the land all the way back to Egypt’s chains.

Only two scouts, Caleb and Joshua, countered the complaints.

“We should go up and take possession...,” declared Caleb, “for we can certainly do it: (13:30).

“The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good,” added Joshua. “If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land [...] And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them” (14:7-9).

The text records the subsequent success of the mission...

Even as many of us can recite litanies of blessings that have guided us thus far on our own spiritual journeys, sometimes still we feel the hot breath of some Nephilim of worry closing in. Our confidence cracks; the cloud of certainty evaporates. In the thick of a night’s—or day’s—distress the enemies of peace, trust, and hope, some, hulking large and menacing, invade the void.

But like our spiritual ancestry, we can be of the faithful remnant, the loyal scouts, because He has promised to never leave nor forsake us.

We, too, can walk in power, love, and sound-mindedness.

Because the battle for body, soul, and spirit has already been won—at the entrance to the eternal Promised Land, its threshold, an empty tomb.

For you and me, it is still a “mop up campaign” as we journey with Christ—Who has already defeated the (real) foe, scouted the land and declared, “It is good.”

And He says to us today what He said to those of old:

“Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s” (Chronicles 20:15).

Invitation

Write about a time you experienced victory in Christ—despite the odds.

[1] For Abraham's story, see Genesis 12-25
For Sarah's story, see Genesis 12:25 and Hebrews 11:11
For Noah's story, see Genesis 6-9

For Deborah's story, see Judges 4-5
For David's story (re: Goliath in particular—one of the Nephilim, it is conjectured) 1 Samuel 17
For Abigail's story, see 1 Samuel 25
For Peter's story, see Matthew 16:13-20
For Mary's story, see Luke 1:26-38

[2] Here are several references of numerous web entries available re: the Nephilim:

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/aid/v2/n1/who-were-the-nephilim>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nephilim>

<http://www.bibleprobe.com/nephilim.htm>

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/n/nephilim.html>

<http://www.khouse.org/articles/1997/22/>

Timing

Psalm 91:9-10



If you say, 'The Lord is my refuge,' and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent.

But what about if we believe and pray and try our very best to stay close to the Lord and to do the right things and when we blow it we try to quickly repent and get back on track but bad things still happen?

Or the answer to prayer seems to take forever?

And then we DO feel harmed and disaster DOES loom mighty near—or actually enters—our “tent”?

And if that weren't distressing enough, the long line of “[Job's](#) friends” arrive who are sure this or that disaster is all our fault, we blew it, there must be some hidden sin we haven't confessed and so on.

Or somebody else comes along and explains, slowly and carefully, in love, that [God](#) selects cancer or bankruptcy or a broken heart or whatever else *specifically for us* because He wants to teach us something like patience or humility.

Or yet another insists we didn't pray right or believe right or engage in the right form of prayer or exercise enough faith...

Sigh.

But consider: what if God DOES hear our prayer and DOES send help but TIMING is part of the equation?

Time Travel

Step away from the "[time clock](#)" with me for a moment.

Eternity is one of those ideas humans are always grappling with. Is it real? Do we understand it only "by faith?" Or do mathematicians and physicists also have answers?

Though I am not saying I understand [Albert Einstein](#)'s theory of relativity, i.e., "time speeds up or slows down depending on how fast one thing is moving relative to something else" [1], by whittling it down to common level of thought I think we can draw an analogy about eternity based on the idea.

If, as the theory goes, the faster a person travels the more slowly he or she ages we might deduce that at some point aging would cease altogether: eternity? At least this may be a way to understand eternity.

While here in the slow lane we continue to keep our eye on the clock, someone hurtling through space at speeds of, say, 25,000 miles-per-hour may no longer need a clock. And yet, what is happening just now for us inching our way forward on *terra firma* would in another sense simultaneously happen for the space traveler who remains stationary in time.

Slow Motion

How does this relate to [Psalm](#) 91:9-10?

What if when we pray, God does hear, He does answer? It's just that we who live down here in "slow motion" do not realize the answer just now in our [time frame](#)?

Or perhaps *something else altogether* but still time-bound stalls the manifestation of the answer to our request. Consider: in the tenth chapter of Daniel, it is recorded that the "Prince of Persia" (generally regarded as a demon), restrained the [angel Gabriel](#) from bringing the answer to Daniel's prayer for twenty-one days.

Luke chapter eight features a woman "who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years"—and, the verse notes, "but no one could heal her" until, that is, Jesus came along, circa 30-33 A.D.

And, at the apex of history, consider a babe born in a manger "in the fullness of time"—though mankind was *surely* in need and "in plead," you might put it, beforehand.

At the right time, in the right place, consider how God answered those prayers.

In His Time

In the spiritual sense, God's Word reveals that, like Einstein's theory suggests, we are at once ticking through our literal time on earth, while also (already) "seated in the heavenlies with [Christ Jesus](#) (see [Ephesians](#) 2:6).

We can at once trace our origin back to our physical birthday *while at the same time* we were in God's mind "from the foundation of the world" (see Ephesians 1:4).

In short, taking *our* idea of time out of the equation, we can simultaneously plead our case and give praise for the answer, even as God, Who knows the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10) "works all things together for our good" (Romans 8:28) in *His* idea of time.

Sometimes the answer to prayer comes in the "now" we theorize and perceive; sometimes it manifests later, in the "Divine Now," as it were. You might say we are at once believing for—and also resting in—the safety of God's abode where all prayer is answered, faith, that "substance of things hoped for [...] evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1)—the entrance.

While physicists continue to hone their hypotheses and believers still eagerly await the fruition of the promises embedded in the Psalm, in a (spiritual) galaxy far, far away yet as near as the prayer whispered in the midst of some trial by night or tribulation by day the One Who designed space, time, physicists— and you and me—invites us still, through faith, to enter His refuge.

And, He, "up there," also gifts us with that very faith we need to await the exact day and hour of the manifestation of the outcome "down here".

For All Time

Maybe it ultimately turns out that Job's friends were right: our trial or tribulation can be chalked up to the usual suspects: the world, the flesh and/or the devil.

Or not.

Maybe it ultimately turns out that in the middle of waiting for the answer to our prayer we did learn (insert virtue, here), an added blessing.

Or not.

Or maybe while we waited, God, in His timeless sovereignty, accomplished something for us that we might not understand, cannot possibly comprehend, until that day when time ceases entirely and eternity shines without shadow before us.

And just maybe we will finally—and only—comprehend fully what sorrows us now the day *He* wipes away every tear of doubt, fear, frustration, and heartache *for* us—and our preachers and friends, too—for all time, every promise fulfilled, heartache eased, and grief dissipated. A refuge, indeed...

Invitation

Write about a time God answered your prayer--at just the right time.

[1] <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/einstein/hotsciencetwin/>

The Presence of Angels

Psalm 91:11-12



For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone...

I rarely, if ever, suspect the presence of angels.

This is one of those times.

The Incident

We had not heard from my sister (who lives in another state) for two days.

We were *very* concerned.

Because of an alleged breach in security at her high-risk workplace (court case pending) she had recently suffered a life-threatening assault. Her 250-pound assailant (my sister is petite) broke her hand in the scuffle, but the crime also caused significant post-trauma stress resulting in panic attacks and nightmares. She was on medical leave and under medical care at the time of the event detailed below.

During her ongoing trauma recovery, my other sisters and I talked with her daily on the phone. Sometimes more than once per day. “Call at will, 24/7” was and is our expression.

So when she had not responded to our voice messages for two days nor to her husband’s calls (he was working in another part of their state) we were concerned.

When she finally contacted me, her voice was shrill.

“Oh my God! I just spent the night in jail,” she sobbed. “They said I was drunk but I wasn’t. I kept telling them something happened in my brain. I don’t remember what happened; I don’t know what happened,” she repeated, over and over, “and they put me in jail. But I wasn’t drunk...”

What?! My sister? Jail?...

Her words jumbled together but I learned her husband was with her and she was in a hospital. He later clarified what had happened and what was happening. She had been jailed as a result of reckless driving the police assumed was caused by driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

She was asked to prepare a summary of what she recalls of the incident for her upcoming court hearing. It reads as follows.

Incident Report

I don't remember losing consciousness, but I remember regaining consciousness while driving. On regaining awareness, I looked at the speedometer; it registered 84 mph. I looked out at the road and realized somehow I came to be on the wrong side of South ____. Though I could see and hear again, the right side of my body was paralyzed, completely without feeling, dead. I could not move my foot as it was jammed on the accelerator. I tried to heave my paralyzed right foot off of the accelerator and then I went blind again, losing all vision, just hearing the wind and engine noise. Then I lost consciousness again. As far as I could tell, this whole sequence of events was a few seconds long.

My next experience was coming to consciousness and asking a police officer to administer a breathalyzer test. I was very disorganized and confused; I did not know what time of day it was or why I was where I was. I did not understand what the officer was saying to me. Her speech was garbled to my hearing and I

was desperately trying to understand her directions. Then I remember going black again.

While in jail I briefly remember “coming to” again trying to figure out how to use the public phone to call my husband. I was not able to understand the mechanism and began to black out again. I remember lying down on something hard, either a bench or the floor. I do not remember getting out or going home the next morning. Apparently I called my husband and he came to my house in ____ and transported me to a hospital where I was admitted to a locked psychiatric unit and stayed for ten days due to acute suicidality. I have no memory of my admission for the first 2 days of my stay and very spotty recollections if the first five days or so of my whole experience.

The Presence of Angels

The judge will review her summary, the police report, and the 911 call log that reveals multiple reports of a driver careening at a high rate of speed in and out of the wrong lane of the 55 mile-per-hour two-lane highway ribboned with numerous S-curves. That driver, my sister, ***narrowly missed multiple head-on collisions.***

The judge will review the toxicology report revealing no drug or alcohol influence.

And an [MRI](#) is also scheduled to help determine what happened in her brain during those crucial minutes: seizure? Stroke? “Dissociative Fugue” [1] episode related to the workplace assault (she had just been to her workplace to collect her paycheck)?

Her legal team is confident.

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It is rare when I suspect the presence of angels.

This is one of those times.

Clear to all, my sister should not have survived—nor should the passengers in any one of the multiple cars she “narrowly missed” on that treacherous highway have survived.



## Invitation

Write about a time you suspected the presence of angels, or heard of such a story.

[1] “Dissociative Fugue” also known as “[Psychogenic Fugue](http://psychcentral.com/disorders/dissociative-fugue-symptoms/)”:  
<http://psychcentral.com/disorders/dissociative-fugue-symptoms/>  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fugue\\_state](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fugue_state)

# Lions and Dragons and Snakes, Oh My!

Psalm 91:13



*You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.*

My friend dreamt she was climbing a path toward heaven. The passageway, though neither perfect nor straight and at an incline that took some effort, was clearly seen and easily scaled. It was lit by a narrow band of light shed only on the path, and she sensed the presence of angels.

The landscape on either side, however, remained dark, dense, and, she felt, throbbing with evil. (Perhaps the smell of sulfur wafting near?)

We discussed this with regard to the “light” of God’s Word: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105, KJV).

I think of the dream and the scripture now with regard to the nature of “what waits without” anticipating our (spiritual) misstep, coiled to strike.

Throughout the scriptures, the creatures in today’s passage (which, defined, include also a kind of serpent-like dragon) symbolize danger, cunning, threats to life, and satanic temptation [1].

And though ugly in the realm of the spirit, demons can also appear in the flesh as angels of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Perhaps these are the most dangerous of all.

Not hard to figure out what can happen when we stray off the path of God’s Word, here!

Yet, when sight dims or fails or some bright and shiny “new” teaching or doctrine tricks the eye off the path, the Body of Christ has this encouragement:

*“The God of peace shall tread Satan under your feet’* (Rom.16:20). Christ has broken the serpent’s head, spoiled our spiritual enemies ([Col. 2:15](#)), and through him *we are more than conquerors*; for Christ calls us, as Joshua called the captains of Israel, to come and set our feet on the necks of vanquished enemies” [2].

(However clever their disguise.)

Not only are angels present to minister to us (Psalm 91:11), Jesus the Word Made Flesh is as well, the path paved with His blood, the light provided by His power.

## Invitation

Write about a time God saved or restored you.

[1] <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+91%3A13&version=KJV>

[2] Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary*. Zondervan. 678.

# It's in the Name

Psalm 91:14



*“Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.”*

As opposed to names in many Western cultures which are often given to honor a relative or selected from trending baby names, in traditional Jewish culture a name is much more than a moniker, a tag, a title, or a label; it is “the intrinsic nature, indispensable quality of the person that determines [...] character: his/her soul, spirit, nature” [1].

The name of God in the Bible defines Him as The Most High, our Lord and Master, our “Banner” (victory in battle), our Shepherd, our Healer, our Righteousness, our Sanctification, our Provision, and our Peace [2].

Now, that’s a “nameful”!

(As opposed to “Phyllis,” for example, which means, from the Greek, a “green bough” or from the Latin, a condition involving intense burning and itching.)

God’s name in this light is also a “blessingful!”

And to “acknowledge” [3] the length, depth, and breadth of God’s nature thus defined is to love Him.

Particularly if one has learned or assumed another kind of god.

In the legalistic, largely man-made religious system of my youth, I had no such idea of God. I imagined Him, rather, as He Who Scowls and sits on the throne with a pen poised over a list of my “naughties” and my “nices” like some kind of macabre Santa Claus—because that god didn’t give just a lump of coal to the naughty.

He dispensed sulfur and brimstone.

For an undetermined amount of time in the afterlife—or for eternity.

Although sometimes I tried to at least even the score with Him, I knew deep down I wasn’t winning this.

I couldn’t escape the notion that one day I was saved, the next, not, depending on how I behaved. I felt, spiritually, like a Yo-yo with a frayed string, one minute uncoiling over Hell’s pit, the next, coiling back up to safety. But always, the flames.

Phew!

And I carried this, if sub-consciously, into my new life in Christ which I began some years later.

Until one day.

As I went about my chores the day of note I pondered the idea of loving God (a dominant theme in Scripture).

I stopped what I was doing (specifically, making the bed), and said, out loud, sheet wafting downward, “If I am supposed to love You, God, why is it so hard?”

What immediately came to mind was this: “Because from the time you were a small child, you thought I was out to hurt you.”

Whoa.

Yes!

I understood.

The old notions of “sins of omission, commission, venial, and mortal” and the hundreds of behavior-based rules and regs I had learned in days of yore that were essential to obey, to avoid the flames, flashed to mind as did the frustrating struggles against sin, anxious examinations of conscience, and hovering dread.

“You are absolutely right!” I said. Out loud. To no one visible.

And something lifted off my soul...

Since then it has been a source of great and abiding joy to find out God’s real intent for those who acknowledge Him and receive His Son Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior through whom all the benefits and blessings of this Christian life are made possible. Everything from *my next breath* to life eternal.

## Invitation

Write about a time when you, too, realized that God is FOR you, not against you (see Romans 8:31).

[1] [https://www.google.com/search?q=synonyms+for+name&rlz=1C1AFAB\\_enUS483US483&oq=synonyms+for+name&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l5.2515j0j4&sourceid=chrome&espv=210&es\\_sm=93&ie=UTF-8#es\\_sm=93&espv=210&q=synonyms+for+essence](https://www.google.com/search?q=synonyms+for+name&rlz=1C1AFAB_enUS483US483&oq=synonyms+for+name&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l5.2515j0j4&sourceid=chrome&espv=210&es_sm=93&ie=UTF-8#es_sm=93&espv=210&q=synonyms+for+essence)

[2] [http://www.blueletterbible.org/study/misc/name\\_god.cfm](http://www.blueletterbible.org/study/misc/name_god.cfm)

[3] To know, be aware of, comprehend, consider, detect, discern, among many other synonyms—Strong's, 3045: *yada*.



# Honors

Psalm 91:15



*He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.*

## **Their Honor**

“Honors” aren’t what they used to be. Awards abound. Medals, trophies, and ribbons for achievement are no longer given just those who “exceed expectations.” Minimal “mastery,” it seems, is now acceptable to win the prize and for multiple new reasons.

I read a few years ago, for example, where all members of a pre-school class were given a blue ribbon at their “graduation” for being “the cutest kindergarten class ever.”

For another example, a trophy for mere participation in some event has become a national joke, at least here in the U.S.

My final example has to do with international “honors” now suspect when it is not even newsworthy that some recipients lack either the expertise or the achievement—or perhaps both—assumed by the awards; rather, they seem merely members of some favored social or political class.

## **Her Honor**

Even if an award is duly achieved, it soon collects dust as the next prize is eyed.

This calls to mind a short conversation I once had with Bertha Holt, co-founder along with her husband Harry, of [Holt International Children's Services](#) [1]. I worked at the agency for several years.

“Grandma,” as we affectionately called Mrs. Holt, was in for her weekly hair appointment and office work, even then, in her nineties. We were taking care of some business at the front desk and she pointed to the awards display case set in a prominent place in the lobby.

“Look at that one,” she said, pointing to a beautifully formed glass sculpture. She described to me why it was unique of design, not even mentioning that it was a high award from Korea for her work there. She commented briefly on one or two others.

“But these things just end up collecting dust,” she concluded, with her characteristic little chuckle and a dismissive wave of her hand.

Of course, I knew what Grandma prized most: every single small or great, one-on-one or to-an-international-audience opportunity to evangelize. It seemed Grandma waited only for the chance to ask you (usually within five minutes of greeting), whether you were some dignitary from overseas or new, entry-level hire, “And do you know the Lord, Jesus Christ, as your personal Savior?” That, I believe, was her “prize,” so to speak. Her *raison d'être*, that for which she lived and worked among us. And Grandma was eager to share it.

But back to that which merely collects dust and rust with little import. Some think, why go for the gold? Might as well shed the stress and shoot for “satisfactory” or join some “in group” and play the one-upmanship game.

And the shine fades from progress...

### **Our Honor**

“[God](#)’s honor,” on the other hand, is not a dime-a-dozen blue ribbon or plastic statue or even a merited trophy or shiny, real gold medal awarded to VIPs in just a few fields of human endeavor.

Nor is His honor bestowed for trivial reasons, given on the basis of some once-in-a-lifetime accomplishment, or awarded on the basis of some politically correct criteria.

God’s honor as noted in verse 15 comes to us at the highest cost: the literal shed blood of Jesus Christ, “through Whom all things [2] were created (formed, shaped, changed, transformed)” [3], including the highest “spiritual award” of all: salvation.

The honor of salvation, bestowed by faith in that price paid by Christ, is also multi-beneficial, as in “deliverance, prosperity, security, and victory” [4] and the benefits are available 24/7.

But isn’t this, some might say, like the awards described above that are not really earned, as in Somebody else did all the work for us?

Yes!

(Cue the sound of the [hallelujah](#) chorus and the praise and thanksgiving of saints from every era, from palaces and prisons, from the “best” and the “least,” from the talented and gifted and those not so much.)

But here is the grand difference, the truth that keeps believers close to Christ, humbled, grateful, and anticipating with great joy seeing Him face-to-face: this honor is bestowed via un-earned favor (grace) from a “Judge” who is not only just but also, loving.

Words from an old chorus put it well:

**He paid a debt He did not owe;  
I owed a debt I could not pay;  
I needed someone to wash my sins away.**

**And, now, I sing a brand new song,**

**“Amazing Grace.”**

**Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay. [5]**

Grandma Holt, though duly honored among the world’s elite, knew this.

And we, too, who call on God continually for help, deliverance, healing, and transformation, and whom God honors by answering our prayers, know it, too.

## Invitation

Write about a time you turned to God for help and He honored you and brought you out of your trouble.

[1] <http://holtinternational.org/about/historical.shtml>

[2] <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/pas.html>.

[3] *ktizo* (*Strong's concordance*, # 2936) as used in [Colossians](#) 1:16.

[4] <http://biblehub.com/hebrew/3444.htm>

[5] <http://www.touchjesussongs.net/lyricspage15.htm>

# How Long?

Psalm 91:16



*With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.*

The sentiment expressed in the last verse of [Psalm 91](#) is a fitting conclusion to this entire Psalm dedicated to detailing God's expansive love.

Not only does He save, shelter, rescue, cover, protect, send angels to guard, and honor us, He also satisfies us with "long life."

How long?

*Very* long.

"Forever" (*orek* in the original language)! [1]

Of course this one and that one live a literal "long life" here on the planet, many hundreds of years in days of old, according to some Biblical accounts.

In our day, just one hundred years seems the maximum. Ironically, however, the notion in the world is that the "good die young!"

("Hmmmmm, ssssssssssssss," says one to himself, the stench of sulfur in his nostrils, a sneer on his face. "Now THAT notion will keep them from making a decision to follow....*Him*.... until it's too late.")

But regardless of how long we live on earth, the time when time will be no more stretches vast ahead—where The One Who Hisses will also be no more.

The contrast of an eternity of peace versus the shortness of earthly life with its struggles whether it be 10 or 110 years, reminds me of a conversation my mother and I had from time to time during the last years of her life.

Because she suffered with congestive heart failure and several other maladies, she sensed she could die at any time, particularly in her eighties (she died at 86). Once in awhile, when this or that ailment was causing frustration or alarm, she liked to be reminded of something I came up with once that ministered to us both.

I told her I could imagine us having a few chuckles over a comment such as this, some day, in the peace and provision of paradise: “Now, tell me again, just WHY it was that we wanted to live forever DOWN THERE?!”

Life in Christ is truly the Never Ending Story—with the happy ending. And it all starts here by receiving Him as Lord and Savior.

## Invitation

Write about a time you were encouraged or comforted by remembering what awaits you in eternity.

[1] [Strong's Concordance](#), # 753.