

Dealing With Life's Hardships and Uncertainties (Part 4)

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[0 : 00] What are you doing to combat the temptation to get all stressed out and worried about some of the uncertainties in your life?

Or some of just the plain hard things you're having to go through? Or maybe it's not you that you're tempted to worry about, it's somebody you love, somebody in your family, one of your best friends. Are you learning what God has given us in His Word as alternatives to worry? Replacing worry with such things as we've seen over the last three weeks, like praying instead of worrying.

That's what Paul told us in Philippians chapter 4. Are you trying to live with the right priorities and focus on one day at a time as Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 6? Have you been reading Psalm 137, or 139 rather, that we started looking at last week? Psalm 139 is one of the great passages of Scripture that call our attention to God and His just greatness.

[1 : 21] But also His personal involvement in our lives. Psalm 139 is one of the best chapters you could ever read, think about, dwell on.

That would help us to trust God instead of worrying. Trust Him in every situation, even when we don't know what the outcome's going to be, instead of being anxious and fretting over it.

I want us to return to Psalm 139 this morning. I want to begin like I did last week by giving you sort of an overview. David tells us some things about God, listen, that He found comforting.

Everybody does not. The first part, verses 1 through 6, God knows everything. That's what we looked at last week.

Today we're going to look at just verses 7 through 12. God is everywhere. Now I said last week that I did not want to take four weeks to go through this because there's four sections.

[2 : 35] There's just no way that I could do justice to it and just go through all these 24 verses today. So we're going to do it in four weeks.

Last week, God knows everything. Today, God is everywhere. Next week, God can do anything. Verses 13 through 18. Then the last week, God will deal with everyone.

Verses 19 through 24. Let's just read verses 7 through 12 today. Psalm 139, 7 through 12. Where shall I go from your spirit?

He's writing about the spirit of God. He's talking about God. He's referring here to the spirit of God. Where shall I go from your spirit? Where shall I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you're there. If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me.

[3 : 42] And your right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me and the light about me be night. Even the darkness is not dark to you.

The night is bright as the day. For darkness is His light with you. Last week, we looked at verses 1 through 6.

God's knowledge. What David tells us in those first six verses is that God knows everything. But we're going to make this personal. As we go through this, Psalm 139, we are going to see what he says about how great, glorious, awesome God is.

Because, for example, He knows everything. But David is making this personal, so we're going to make it personal. Don't just think God knows everything.

Think God knows me. And we looked in detail last week how God knows everything about me. Today, God's presence.

[4 : 53] God is everywhere. But don't just let that blow your mind about God being every place, fully, at the same time.

Think more personally. God is with me. God is always with me. Now, David, the psalmist, he's describing how God is present in every part of the universe.

But what he really wants to emphasize is how God is always present with him. And the readers of this, we need to think how God is always present with me.

This section begins with two rhetorical questions. Look at verse 7. Where shall I go from your spirit? Where shall I go from your spirit? Where shall I flee from your presence? David expects everyone who reads this or hears this to say, nowhere.

I cannot escape God. He thinks that will be the automatic response of people who are hearing or reading this. But just to make sure there's no misunderstanding, what he does in the rest of these verses that we've read, he goes on to point out specific ways that God is present in every part of the universe.

[6 : 12] Now, keep in mind as we read through this, the psalms are poems or songs. So David is describing where God is, how he's everywhere in symbolic ways, as you do when you're writing poetry.

But don't miss the point. Look at it. God is in heaven above and the grave below. That's verse 8. Look at it again. If I ascend to heaven, you are there.

If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. Heaven is the place of the living. Sheol is the place of the dead. Sheol is not hell.

In the New Testament, the word would be Hades. There is a word that refers to the fire of hell. The place of punishment, Gehenna. This is talking about the place of the dead.

That we can think of as until Jesus comes back, and there's a new heaven and a new earth, and the final state takes place. In the place of the dead now, there's a place like paradise.

[7 : 30] Jesus told a parable about a rich man and a poor man. The poor man was named Lazarus. And they both died. Lazarus was in what he called the bosom of Abraham.

He was in a good place. A place of comfort. But the rich man, because he had just been so selfish all of his life, didn't care about God or other people, he was in a place of torment.

But it was the place of the dead is what I want us to see here. Heaven is the place of the dead.

Sheol is the place of the living. Sheol is the place of the dead.

That's what David is trying to tell us. But then he tells us in verses 9 and 10, God is in the east and the west. Look at what he says, how he says that. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your eye hand shall hold me.

The phrase, the wings of the morning, most likely is describing the rays of the sun as the sun rises in the east, and that uttermost parts of the sea.

[8 : 39] David's riding from Israel. And to the west is the Mediterranean Sea. And so he's riding about the uttermost part of the Mediterranean Sea on the west and the rising sun, the rays of the sun on the east.

David is trying to let us know, poetically, that wherever we go, whether we be high or low, east or west, God is there.

But then it's a little bit different here in verses 11 and 12. He points out another way that God's present in our life. God is present in the darkness. Look at it again. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night, even the darkness is not dark to you.

The night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. You know, there's a lot of people who think of darkness as scary.

Or maybe secretive. I don't want to ask any boys and girls to embarrass themselves by raising their hand, but I bet there's a lot of boys and girls in this room right now.

[10 : 01] Truth is, you're scared of the dark. And truth is, there's adults in this room, you're scared of the dark too.

It's sort of a universal thing. And then, we as adults, more likely, and teenagers fall into this category too, darkness is sort of like a secret place, isn't it?

Darkness, that's where you can go and hide or do things that you hope nobody ever finds out about. A lot of bad things, evil things, take place at night, take place in the dark. A lot of things we don't want anybody to do, we slip around and do it when we think no one will notice or see us at night. Well, David is trying to tell us, listen to this, David is telling us that with God, there's no such thing as darkness. For God, He's never in the dark.

[11 : 13] God is light, and so wherever He goes, He lights up everything. So, think of this. When we think we're doing something in secret, when we think we're slipping around in the dark, God is

there.

And the, His spotlight is shining brightly. No one else may see us. No one else may figure it out. But God does. It's sort of like He's standing over our shoulders. He's with us. He's watching. He knows what we're thinking. He knows what we're doing. David's telling us, wherever you go, whatever you do, high, low, east, west, dark, whenever.

God's there. He is there with you. Now, those are the verses. Let's think about it. Is the thought of God's constant presence in your life like this.

[12 : 25] Does it comfort you? Is it a good thing to you? Well, for David, it was. It really was.

David was not a perfect man, and most of you know here, David had his own issues. He did sinful things. Sometimes he tried to cover up sinful things. And the Bible tells us about that.

Very clear. But at the same time, overall, David was thrilled to know that God knew everything about him.

Look at verse 6 from last week. Verses 1 through 5 talks about how God knows everything about us, and then he says, such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high. I cannot attain it.

He loved the thought God knew, even though there were some bad things. He didn't want, deep down, he didn't want those bad things to continue. He was glad God saw it, knew it, and brought him to a place of owning up to it, confessing it, being forgiven.

[13 : 35] Well, we see now in verse 10 that David finds comfort in knowing that God is with him. Look at it, verse 10. Even there, your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

David thought of God's hand as comforting, strength, his strong hand. What about you? Do you find comfort in knowing that God is always with you?

Well, if we have a right relationship with him, we should. If we really understand who we are as Christians, united to Christ by faith, if we really understand that our sins are forgiven because Jesus took our punishment, we really are right before God because Jesus lived that perfect, right life, and that's credited to us when we trust him.

So if we really know who we are in Christ, we will know that we are children of God who are accepted by God.

You know, a lot of people, even some Christians, a lot of people think God's always out to get them. God can never be satisfied. I can never be real sure and comfortable in my relationship with him because I'm not perfect.

[15 : 00] That's not what the Bible teaches. Certainly, we are sinners. We don't deserve his love, his favor. We don't deserve to be his children. But God's God of grace.

He gives what we don't deserve. God forgives us, makes us his child when we trust in Christ. And that should be comforting to you to know that God accepts you, he loves you, he's your heavenly father, and he wants to take care of you.

You know, this is a reoccurring theme in the Bible. Even the Old Testament prophets, they had a lot of things to say to the people of Israel about their sin, their just rebellion.

They sometimes did preach a strong, hard statement about judgment. Unless you repent, you are going to perish. And that happened. But the prophets also offered hope to the people.

The prophets talked about God's love and God's mercy and God's forgiveness. The prophets, a lot of times, were God's own spokesperson. Spokesman.

[16 : 09] Here's an example. Isaiah chapter 41. I'm going to read from the New Living Translation. Speaking for God, Isaiah says, don't be afraid for I am with you.

Listen, God's saying, don't be afraid for I am with you. Don't be discouraged for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.

God wants you to understand this. If you're his child, he wants to help you this way. You know, one of the last things Jesus told his disciples before he ascended into heaven, he would always be with us.

Jesus told us, we need to be in the world sharing with people what Christ has done for us, sharing the gospel with people. We need to be making disciples. That's one of the things we're called to do as Christians.

Well, Jesus didn't say, go and do that the best you can. He says, go and do that and I'll be with you always. Look at it. Matthew 28, 20. Jesus said, and behold.

[17 : 10] In the New English, in the ESV version, English Standard Version, when you say that word, behold, that means sit up and take notice. What's about to be said is very important.

And it says, and behold, Jesus said, I am with you always to the end of the age. Jesus said that because it's supposed to mean something to us as his follower, that he's with us. It's supposed to help us, comfort us, strengthen us. When or where do you feel the most alone or afraid?

When do you feel the most insecure? For a lot of us, it happens during, while you go through a crisis at night.

I want you to think, it happens a lot of times, it can happen at any time, but I want you to think about some of the crises you have gone through and it was dark, it was night. It just felt like it would never end.

[18:19] Think about when you had a child who was sick and you had to sit up with that child trying to take care of them. Or for some of you, you can, you can understand this now and you couldn't in a time gone by, sitting up with a parent who's in bad shape or even dying.

Sometimes you can be at a hospital or even at home. You're waiting for them to die. And it's night. And you feel so all alone.

You feel like it's going to last forever. Sometimes you've had conflicts in your home at night.

It may not have started until 12 o'clock, but it was going on at 2 and at 3. It was a long, dark, alone, anxious night.

Well, the best ways for us as God's children to deal with such times is to first of all acknowledge that He is God and that we as His children can trust Him.

[19:44] I'm not being simplistic here. As we go through these times, these times of anxiety, loneliness, isolation, whatever you want to call it, well, the best ways for us to deal with it is to acknowledge, pray, talk to someone we're involved with about the fact God is with us and we're going to trust Him.

We're going to trust His promises that He will not abandon us. Look back at that Isaiah 41.10 that we looked at a while ago. I'm going to look at it now from the English Standard Translation.

He says, Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. Look at this. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

God wants us to trust us. God wants us to trust Him that He is for us, that He is with us. He promises to give to us, His people, His children, what we need when we need it.

Look at it again. He says, God says, I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Here's the question.

[21:07] Do you trust God automatically in those times of stress? And just, it's just natural for you as a child of God to ask Him to strengthen you when you are weak.

To help you when you're helpless. To hold you up or hold you together when you're about to fall apart physically, emotionally, or even spiritually.

You know, children do that. Little children in a home where they know their parents love them and they know they can trust their parents. When something bad happens, children just automatically, it's a knee-jerk reaction, they go to their parents because they know their parents will give them the strength or just be there with them to help them.

They know their parents will try to get them through it, listen, encourage, comfort in some kind of way.

Well, God wants us to reach out to Him that way because He is our Heavenly Father who loves us and He enjoys doing such things for His people.

[22:28] Boys and girls, listen to me, boys and girls, wake up. Wake up. As I asked you a while ago, are you ever afraid of the dark? Are you ever afraid to go to sleep at night?

Well, God wants you to know that He's always with you, that you're never alone in that house or that room or in that bed. God promises to help you.

And so the next time you're alone, you're afraid, say this out loud, God is with me.

God will strengthen me. God will help me. Think to yourself, I can go to sleep because God's going to stay up all night. I can go to sleep in this dark room because God's here and it's not even dark to Him.

He's going to watch over me. He's going to stay on guard. He's going to stay alert so I can let my guard down and go to sleep.

[23:36] You know, one of the most comforting statements in the Bible about this is just a statement found in Hebrews chapter 13, verse 5 that a lot of you know.

I've referred to it a lot over the years. I want you to look at it. For He has said, talking about God, I will never leave you nor forsake you. I like the way the NIV translation really emphasized the fact that God will never do this.

Look at it. Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you. Do you know the context of that statement? That's just part of verse 5. I want you to look at the whole thing.

Look at all of verse 5. Hebrews 13, 5. The writer says, Keep your life free from love of money and be content with what you have for He has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

The thought is, our greatest source of contentment should be that we know God and we have a relationship with Him in which He promises to never leave us nor forsake us.

[24 : 49] God is saying, keep your life free from the love of money and if money's not your problem, put something else there. The love of what? Be content with what you have.

In other words, let God be enough. Let knowing Him, having a relationship with Him, having His promises be enough to make you content where you are.

There are many reasons why that's true, but I want you to note what's pointed out here, what's obvious. God will never leave us nor forsake us now or for all eternity. Money will leave you and forsake you and forsake you eventually.

The fact is, we are not going to take any of it with us into eternity. You know, what we're looking at here, it's very similar to what we saw in Matthew chapter 6 two weeks ago when Jesus told us not to worry about what we eat, drink, or wear.

Jesus was just basically saying, don't worry about the necessities of life. Your Heavenly Father knows what you need and He'll make sure that your needs are met. Now, it does not say that He'll do everything you want Him to do.

[26 : 14] He'll give you everything you desire. But Jesus is saying the key to not worrying is to trust your Heavenly Father knows you, He loves you, He's able to meet your needs, and He will.

Therefore, you seek Him first. You seek His priorities. You seek His will. You seek His rule over your life is what He actually said.

That's the key to finding comfort in the fact that God is always present in our lives. That's the key, having a close relationship and trusting Him this way.

Now, is the thought of God always being with you comforting will thank Him?

but let me switch gears a little bit. Is the thought that God is always with you convicting in the sense that it makes you feel guilty?

[27 : 24] Or is it frightening you? If it is, it most likely means one of two things. Either you're not a Christian or you are a Christian but you're not living in a close relationship, having good fellowship with Him.

Let's look at both. If you're not a Christian, you need to understand that one day you're going to stand alone before God and give an account for how you've actually lived your life in this world.

That's going to be a problem for you if you're not a Christian. Because the Bible clearly says, and I want you to look at it, Hebrews 4.13, nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight.

Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.

We're all going to stand before the Lord. We're all going to stand before God on Judgment Day.

If we're Christians, we've got the Lord Jesus standing there beside us. And we're still sinful people. We've got a lot to be ashamed of, but Jesus has paid the penalty for our sins.

[28 : 36] We are clean before God because of Jesus. That's how we get through the judgment as Christians. But if you're not a believer, if you're not one with Christ, you're going to stand there alone.

A pastor by the name of James Boyce describes how, let me put it this way, he describes what Judgment Day could be like. No one knows. But look at what he says.

What will you do on the day when all your sins will be read out? His idea of Judgment Day is God's going to read from his book, Our Life Story. He says, on that day, you will be abased, confounded, speechless, and overwhelmed as God unfolds the records of your sinful past life, paragraph after paragraph, page after page.

Stop, you will cry. But God will not stop until every sinful thought, every evil deed, every curse, every theft, every lie, every neglect of what you should have done is read out and justly punished.

That's scary. And it ought to be if you're going to stand there alone. But the good news this morning is you don't have to wait until Judgment Day and be there alone.

[30 : 07] Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for the sins you have committed. Jesus died on the cross to take your punishment so that you could be forgiven and so that you wouldn't have to be in terror on the day of judgment.

But we have to respond to what Jesus has done. Jesus' death on the cross doesn't automatically save anyone. We've got to acknowledge we need a Savior. We've got to admit to God our sinfulness, our selfishness and change our mind about it, repent, turn from it, grieve over it. We've got to put our faith in Jesus that he died for me and call upon him to save us. Scripture, one of the clearest statements about this, for whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

that can be you if you're not a Christian and it bothers you and you want to come to him now. You'll find comfort then in your relationship with God, not fear.

But let's think about the other scenario. If you're not getting any sense of comfort and encouragement with the fact that God is always with you, it may be that you're a Christian but you've either rebelled against God or you've drifted away from him.

[31 : 34] Either way, you're not close to him. If you know that you've rebelled against him, you know there's something between you and God, I want to encourage you to admit that, own up to it, quit denying it, repent of that, turn from that, and come back to the Lord with a renewed commitment to him as the Lord of your life.

It could be that you've just drifted away from the Lord. There's no one thing you can point to and say, I've rebelled this way, I don't care, I'm never shaking my fist at God. It may be that you've just let things in your life become a priority that shouldn't be a priority.

And you've just sort of ignored him to the point that there's a lot of distance now. Well, that in itself is sin that is separating you from closeness with God that needs to be confessed and repented of. You need to come back to him, if that's the case today, in a renewed commitment yourself to seeking to know him better, love him more, spend time with him.

As we've seen on several occasions, God is ready and willing to forgive his returning children, repentant children, if we'll come to him, as the verse says in 1 John 1, 9, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[33 : 11] If you're away from God, not enjoying closeness with God, the idea of him being everywhere in your life is not a comfort to you. draw to him in confession that way. Leave here.

In fact, let me ask to say this in closing. God's presence in our lives is intended to comfort us. I want to encourage you to do whatever you need to do so that you can leave here thinking, God is present in my life and I like that.

I love that. It comforts me. Whatever God shows you you need to do for that to be true about you when you leave, do that now as we pray together. Father, show us how to respond.

Father, help us to see from David's life, his experience, what he's written here, that the thought of you knowing us and always being with us should comfort and encourage us, even though we aren't perfect.

Dear God, if there's people in this room who are not Christians and that's why they're afraid and they're running from you, call them to faith in Jesus now.

[34 : 36] Father, if there are Christians in this room who have rebelled, who've backslidden or just let too much of the things of this world capture their attention, wake them up, draw them back to you to that closeness that you desire with them.

Show us all how to respond. In an attitude of prayer, you do what God tells you to do. I'll be here at the front and we'd be happy, love to pray with you during this time.

You come. God so leads you to do that. Let's just be still and quiet, prayerful, and respond as God speaks to each one of us.