

# In the Midst of the Storm

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Good morning, Grace Life. I want to deal with a question that came up from a message that I preached a couple of weeks ago. If you were here, you'll remember that I taught on responding to trials out of 1 Thessalonians and someone asked me a very important question recently in light of that message. What we said was that trials have the potential, in fact they can bring us, they should bring us a sense of joy and courage and a spirit of gentleness as we respond to the trials that come into our lives, and we looked at that at some length. And when you say those things which are true and you help people see what the aspirations in our trials can be, there is the potential for that to be a little bit discouraging if your present immediate experience today is not one of joy and courage and gentleness but one of feeling the weight of the trial and I understand that. And someone asked this important question in light of that message and said, "Well, is it okay for Christians to struggle, then? What do we do with Christians who struggle? What do I do when I am struggling? Are we sinning when we have a difficult time accepting our lot in life? Are we being disobedient? How do we deal with that? How do we understand that? And more importantly, even, how do we respond to that? Is it okay for Christians to struggle?"

Now, I think that that question is not as easy to answer as you might think because on the one hand, of course we struggle. Of course we struggle. I struggle. You struggle. You know, let's not have any pretensions to the contrary. Let's not try to put on a false front simply so that we can look like we're maintaining a Christian testimony when the inner reality is something different for our lives.

Of course we struggle. We face temptations and trials, sin and discouragement, and one aspect of our very need for salvation is that we need deliverance from our present condition in this life, right? This life is hard. It's difficult. It comes with a lot of sorrow and we need deliverance from that present condition in this fallen world. That's one of the benefits of our salvation is that Christ is there to deliver us, Christ is there to encourage us in the midst of the struggle.

Of course we struggle but I'm reluctant to simply give a blanket yes to that question, "Is it okay for Christians to struggle?" I'm reluctant to give a blanket unqualified yes in answer to that question for a slightly different reason. I'm concerned as your pastor that someone might take, if you say it's okay to struggle, that people would take that and misunderstand

what the struggle is supposed to be like; what the nature of the struggle should be and be affirmed in a bad response to struggles that is not what the Christian testimony should be. Even as we recognize the reality of the struggle of the Christian life, we need to embrace something else, you need to embrace something else in this, and that is this very important point: that when we struggle, we struggle within the boundaries of faith, not outside them. In the midst of your struggles and mine, we still must be faithful to Christ. We still must be faithful to Christ in the struggle and we need to understand what the real struggle is because some people, especially in those elements of pseudo-Christianity that try to psychoanalyze Christianity and make it into a matter of psychology rather than of biblical faith. You hear strange things coming out of the mouths of professing Christians about, "You know, maybe you should work on trying to forgive God for the hardship that's in your life." And, you know, you're trying to, you know, you're questioning God and all of that. And that's just very unhealthy. It's not at all biblical and it doesn't lead you to the joy and the courage and gentleness that is the birthright of every true Christian.

So what I would say is this as we're thinking through it: is there a struggle? Yes, there is and what I want you to do today, I say this a lot, is I want you to step back and just set aside the difficulties that you brought into the room and we just need to think about ourselves in relationship to God and see ourselves in the presence of God and think clearly and then come back to the struggles and respond to them rightly.

There is a struggle but understand this: that the struggle that you and I face is for ourselves to be in submission to God, not in opposition to him. The struggle is to rest in him, not to resist him. The struggle is to be quiet before him, not to question him. The struggle is to conform your perspective on God's providence, not to conform providence to your perspective. In other words, it's how you're viewing the difficulties, not the fact that there are difficulties as if that was some unjustified intrusion upon your life. In other words, what I want you to see, what I want to be clear in your mind today is that the battleground is not found in the person and the character of God. It's not the wisdom and love of God that is the battleground in trying to determine whether God is wise here, is God loving here, is God fair here. That is the wrong place to try to fight the battle. That's not where the battle lies. Of course God's wisdom is perfect. Of course his love in your life is perfect. Of course his providence is wisely ordered despite the difficulty of your life. Of course it is. Nothing else could even enter into our minds.

What you have to understand when we say it's okay for Christians to struggle, what I want you to see in the context of the answer to that is that the struggle for you and me is in our hearts and minds. It's to have our hearts and minds, to line our hearts and minds up in submission to what we know to be true; to have our hearts and minds submit, to trust, to love God in the midst of our difficulties. So let me say it this way: our struggles do not give us a license to doubt Christ. Our struggles do not give us a license to sin against him. Your struggles and your trials do not give you license to panic, to be overwhelmed with fear about the future. You do not have license to do that as a Christian. You must be faithful to Christ when you struggle and so your struggle is to be faithful, your struggle is with yourself, not with God if you're a true Christian. Our struggles do not give us

permission to question God's character, to sit in judgment of his ways and say, "This is not right. This is not fair. This is not good. This could never be good."

Well, that's not right and so the struggle is not against God but with our own hearts so that we would line ourselves up and be the kind of people that we should be as professing Christians as those who know and love Christ. So there is a bifurcation, I guess you could say, in the answer. "Is it okay to struggle?" Sure. We struggle with indwelling sin but we understand that the struggle is with ourselves and with our own hearts and that our hearts are divided and we're wanting to unite our heart in trusting submission to God. We don't become those who sit in judgment of the ways and character of God and question him as if he answered to us rather than vice-versa. That's my point.

So in the midst of the storm, then, how is it that we respond? In understanding that there is a struggle, we just need to recognize who the foe is. The foe couldn't possibly be Christ. Christ has proven himself to be our friend, right? It was our loving friend who was on the cross for us.

I remember many many years ago going through a struggle where I was not responding properly. There was just a clarity of understanding that came to me when I said if I'm going to sit and struggle and question God now, I might as well transport back 2,000 years ago, stand in front of my suffering Savior and say, "I'm not sure you love me," and he's hanging there on the cross bearing my sin in his body. Just unthinkable, isn't it? That's just blasphemous to even think about doing that. Well, understand that it's no different 2,000 years later to question the love of God when you have an understanding of the cross, when you have an understanding of the atonement, that Christ interceded for you as a sinner so that you could be reconciled to God and saved from his wrath. It's not right for us to question his love.

So when we find ourselves questioning, we turn the guns on ourselves and say, "No. I can't act that way. I can't think that way. I can't feel that way." So that we would line ourselves up and honor Christ in the midst of the struggle. I hope that's clear, and to make it clearer, we'll go to Scripture.

Psalm 138 is our text for this morning. Turn to Psalm 138. There is a Christian way to wrestle with the challenges of life. There is a Christian way to struggle. There is a godly way to struggle. It is not sinful for you to feel turmoil in your soul, the question is how you respond to it. What you do with that turmoil, what is the direction that you take when the turmoil comes, that is where the struggle lies. That's where we properly engage the battle and in Psalm 138, I think we see a pattern that is going to be very helpful to you and bring some clarity to this.

Psalm 138 is primarily a Psalm of thanksgiving. The first six verses are a testimony of thanksgiving that David gives to the Lord. The first three verses, let's look at those. David opens up giving the thanks of his own heart as he opens this Psalm. He says in verses 1 through 3,

1 I will give You thanks with all my heart; I will sing praises to You before the gods. 2 I will bow down toward Your holy temple And give thanks to Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your word according to all Your name. 3 On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul.

David is giving a private personal testimony of thanksgiving to the Lord as he opens up this Psalm and then he expands out as we go into verses 4 through 6. It's not just a matter of private thanks, he is expanding his view of thanksgiving and he calls on all kings of the earth to give public thanks to the Lord.

Look at verse 4. He says,

4 All the kings of the earth will give thanks to You, O LORD,

That's a picture of the day that is still future to us today when Christ returns and establishes his reign on the earth. All the kings of the earth will come and flow and give thanks and honor to him. That is a messianic statement there in verse 4 that David is making and he says, "All the kings of the earth will give thanks to You, O LORD." There will be a universal acknowledgment of your goodness, there will be a universal acknowledgment from human leaders at that great day that says you are worthy of thanks, worthy of praise, worthy of honor, verse 4,

When they have heard the words of Your mouth. 5 And they will sing of the ways of the LORD, For great is the glory of the LORD. 6 For though the LORD is exalted, Yet He regards the lowly, But the haughty He knows from afar.

God's glory is great. He regards the lowly in his greatness, which is just a message in itself, that God from the greatness of his glory would regard the humble and the penitent and yet he knows the proud from afar. God knows the human condition and he has favor upon those who humbly approach him and he arrays himself against the proud.

So in those first six verses, on a private level David has given thanks. "I'm giving thanks to you, O God, with all my heart," he says. On a public level, he says, "All the kings should give thanks. There should be a universal acknowledgment from all of mankind, O God, to the greatness of your glory, the greatness of your kingdom." And one day that will actually come to pass in history in time and space, but for now David is the one leading, David is the one giving thanks. His heart is filled with gratitude as he opens this Psalm.

Now, stay with me here. You might think that David had no problems and that the absence of inner conflict, the absence of external trials, is what's causing him to give thanks. Superficially, that's sometimes where we go. If there is an absence of turmoil in our lives, we're prone to give thanks. If there is turmoil in our lives, then we are tempted to complain and to be discouraged. So if you approach this Psalm from that kind of

superficial perspective, you might think reading the first six verses that David is in an external situation where things are settled and things are good in his life given the lofty way in which he has prayed. But that is not the case. No, that's not the case at all.

Look at verse 7 here, verses 7 and 8. He says,

7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble,

Right there is the key to today's message. David is giving thanks in the midst of his trouble. He's not waiting until there is resolution, he's giving thanks now even though he is walking in the pattern of his life right now is in the midst of trouble.

He goes on to say,

7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch forth Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, And Your right hand will save me. 8 The LORD will accomplish what concerns me; Your lovingkindness, O LORD, is everlasting; Do not forsake the works of Your hands.

It's those last two verses that I want to focus on here in the remainder of our time together. David has been giving thanks but we see that he still has trouble. Side-by-side with his thanksgiving is turmoil and in the midst of this he shows us three spiritual qualities that mark the true Christian response to struggles. He is showing us the proper way to respond to struggles.

Now, this isn't one of the three points but just from the first six verses, what I want you to see is this and this is where we engage the struggle, this is where we engage the spiritual battle and it's this: that you don't withhold thanks to God until your troubles are over. You give thanks to God now in the midst of the struggle, in the midst of the trial, in the midst of the turmoil. That is the starting point of a proper Christian response to your difficulties is to realize that, "I have the responsibility and the privilege, I have the obligation and the opportunity to thank God now before the trial goes away." And you give thanks to God because of his lovingkindness and his truth. His lovingkindness and his truth and his faithfulness to you are independent of your trials and, therefore, your thanksgiving to him for those attributes and for his character is also independent of your trials. Does that make sense? You realize that God transcends your earthly life and, therefore, your thanksgiving transcends the circumstances of your earthly life as well. And part of the struggle is to say, "Okay, I'm going to be thankful even though I don't feel like it right now. I'm going to give thanks to God because it's about what he is and who he is, not what's going on in my life right now." And that is a challenge but that is where we bring our heart into submission to what our mind knows to be true and we gladly do that.

So David does not say what kind of trouble he's in here in verse 7, but the term that he uses for trouble refers to intense inner turmoil. Intense inner turmoil. He is feeling conflicted as he is praying this way and let me give you a brief flavor for this word. Turn

over to Psalm 77. This word for "trouble," I just want you to see how it's used in another place. Psalm 77:2. I want you to see how this word for trouble is used so you have a sense of the turmoil that David is feeling here in Psalm 138.

In Psalm 77:2, it says, "In the day of my trouble," there's the word, "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; In the night my hand was stretched out without weariness; My soul refused to be comforted. When I remember God, then I am disturbed; When I sigh, then my spirit grows faint. You have held my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak." There is a depth of turmoil when he uses this word. Inner trouble, there is a depth of turmoil that is weighing upon his soul and yet that does not restrain his thanks, it does not restrain his response. The question is not whether you should be there or not, the question is when you find yourself in that kind of trouble, what do you do? How do you respond spiritually? What is the Christian way to respond to those deep sorrows of heart? Those deep conflicts in your mind? Because David is describing serious heartfelt trouble.

So when he says here in Psalm 138, go back there if you haven't already, Psalm 138:7, he says, "I walk in the midst of trouble," what I want you to see is he's describing a kind of inner distress that you and I can relate to. This is not an academic discourse. This is not abstract theology. David is writing from the depths of life experience that were challenging to him, that had the potential to discourage him, that weighed on his heart and the question is: what do you do then? And in times past in my own experience, I was happy to collapse under the weight of that and feel sorry for myself and to justify myself in the midst of the conflict and say, "This just isn't fair. This just isn't right."

I remember with shame one time as a young Christian literally raising my fist toward the sky and saying, "How can you do this to me?" I say that with shame. That's the wrong way to respond and I don't want any of you to be content to live spiritual life at that low level. I want you to realize that that's wrong and to show you a better way from this Scripture that David gives. What I'm saying comes from one who has failed miserably before the Lord on this very point and now I see there's a better way. There is a proper way for us to respond that honors God and actually is constructive, rather than raising your fist against the sky and saying, "Who do you think you are to do this to me?" What an awful reversal of roles that is. You see, we want to go beyond identifying with David's turmoil to see how he dealt with the struggle. How is it that a godly man responds to the struggles if it's not to collapse under the weight of it, if it's not to panic in the midst of it, if it's not to run around just utterly discouraged and fearful, then what is it that we do?

Now, sometimes, I'm going to say this from a Christian pulpit, the Grace Life Pulpit. I'm going to say this from the Grace Life Pulpit. Sometimes the worst thing that you can do when you are facing that kind of turmoil is to pray about it immediately. Sometimes that is the worst thing that you can do if you simply pray something along these lines, "God, I've got this big problem. I am very discouraged. I don't see any way out. I've done everything but it is no use. If you can help me, please do. Amen." I suppose in one sense that praying like that is better than not praying at all but not by very much. It's a slender victory for a prayer like that because that is just a prayer that expresses no confidence in God whatsoever. It is a completely man-centered way to pray, to simply focus on the

nature of the problem and ask, "If you can help me, please do." If you can? What kind of statement is that coming from a redeemed heart? "If you can help me, please do." What is that?

There is such a better way for us to respond and it is the way of Christian maturity; it is the way of Christian growth; it is the privilege and the prerogative of us to respond differently. What I want you to see, go back to verse 7, is that when David says, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble," he acknowledges it honestly, but he doesn't stop there. He doesn't describe the details of his problem to the God who already knows it all. Instead he has been giving extended thanks to God and what he does in these last two verses, as brief as they are, they are a power packed punch of a spiritual instruction to us, he affirms his trust in God and only then does he make a request. He affirms the character of God before he makes his petition and that's what I want you to see. This is the pattern that you and I should follow. It is a pattern that is easy to understand. It is not difficult to see what we should do when you see it modeled for us in the life of David. This is an easy pattern to see, it's an easy pattern to understand, and therefore it is achievable for you and me to apply it to our lives.

What do you do? How is it that you respond? What is the right way to struggle? That's what we could say we're trying to talk about. What's the right way to struggle? Your heart will naturally take you to the wrong way to struggle left uncorrected by the Scriptures and a proper meditation on God. I don't need to teach you the wrong way to struggle because your own heart will take you there: to panic, to fear, to questions, to doubt. Your own heart will take you there. What we need is instruction on how to rather than going down that fork in the road, how do we take the more narrow way? What's the right way to respond?

Well, there are three things that we're going to see in these two verses here. First of all, this isn't complicated but, first of all what do you do in the midst of the struggle? Point 1: you affirm that God's power will help you. You affirm that God's power will help you. You pull up short when your anxious thoughts start to multiply within you. You call a time out, you step back and say, "No, God, I believe that your power will help me in this situation." You affirm that without qualification.

Notice what David does here in verse 7. He says, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble," here's the affirmation, "You will revive me; You will stretch forth Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, And Your right hand will save me." He's in the midst of the trouble, he obviously doesn't see a human solution to the problem as he stands before the Lord in prayer here, but he says in the midst of the storm, in the midst of the trial, in the midst of the trouble when there is no answer on the horizon, he looks independently to the character of God, the power and the omnipotence of God and he says, "I know that You will revive me. You will stretch forth Your hand. You will save me." You affirm that the power of God will help you. Not may. Not asking. You are making a declarative statement in the indicative mood. "God, this will happen. I am confident of this."

David talks about God's hand. God's hand is a symbol for his power. When God redeemed Israel, delivered Israel, brought Israel out of Egypt, Scripture often refers that he delivered them by his right hand, by his power. It was a powerful rescue that he made taking a nation that was dominated in slavery by another nation and removing them from that domination. It was a symbol of his power. What David is saying, he's saying, "God, I am confident that you will one day exercise your power to overcome my enemies." And David is relying on the omnipotence of God to revive him from the situation that was causing him the inner turmoil. He was utterly confident in the power of God despite the turmoil that he was feeling.

Now listen, child of God, listen to me carefully: our God does not abandon his children. Our God is never unfaithful to his children. Our God never abandons us finally and ultimately to our despair and that's why David can confidently say, "You will revive me." His trouble did not limit the power of God to help him. His trouble was not a restraint on the omnipotence of God because God in his omnipotence has the power to execute his will and no human hand can thwart him, right? You believe that, right?

Now, here's what I want you to see: David affirmed that kind of trust in God's omnipotence in the midst of his turmoil. What that means for you and me is this: it means that you and I in the midst of our struggle, in the midst of our turmoil, we must consciously and deliberately and with meditation and with confidence and without qualification affirm that God has the power to help us and to deliver us even when there is no answer in sight. That is just a true statement for us to make and I want you to understand what I'm saying here. It is one thing – and I say this in total sympathy, total pastoral sympathy to those who find themselves in this position – many times I have heard Christians say in the midst of their problems, "Well, God is sovereign," and that's a good statement to make. I'm glad, especially here in the context of our church and of Grace Life, I'm glad that our thoughts go there to say that God is sovereign when we find ourselves in the midst of the trial. But what I want you to see with all pastoral sympathy, what I want you to see is that that statement alone is insufficient. Faith goes one step further. True faith goes one step further and I've seen it so many times. It is quite possible for people to say, "God is sovereign," while side-by-side the next words come out of their mouth that says, "I don't know what I'm gonna do. I'm afraid about what happens." And you can see that they're in a panic even as they're saying that God is sovereign.

There is obviously a disconnect there and what I want you to see here in this point and what David is showing us here is it's more than an abstract theological affirmation of sovereignty that he's making, David is going further and saying, "God, you will exercise your sovereign power to help me." And what I want you to see, beloved, is that what you do is you say more than God is sovereign, you say in the presence of God alone on your knees before God, "God, I am confident that you will help me." It's no longer God is sovereign out there, it's that God is sovereign right here. "And God, I am confident in your sovereign oversight of my life and I know that however long this trial lasts, you will exercise your power to my benefit. You will exercise your power to help me. I have no doubt about that. I don't know what it's going to look like. I can't see where it's going to



come from but, Lord, the cornerstone of my heart is that you have power over this situation and you will exercise that power to help me."

So you acknowledge the struggle. You say, "Yes, I am in a battle here but I will not let this battle overwhelm me because my God is not overwhelmed. My God is not overwhelmed. My God is not overwhelmed. The one who reigns over my life is not overwhelmed by this and, therefore, I will not be either. I am confident in him because I am confident in his power." And if we just think through at all, at a most superficial level at what we say we believe, it would take us right to that point, wouldn't it? We believe that God created the universe in six days out of nothing simply by the power of his spoken word. He did that just by the sheer power of his person, the power of his sovereignty, and he hangs the stars in space without anything suspending them and he just holds them there by his power. Read Job 38-41.

So I know you believe that, what I want you to see is that you take what you believe about those things out there and you bring it down to daily life and say, "God will help me. He will help me and he has the power to help me. And the fact that he has chosen to leave me in this struggle just a little bit longer is simply a reflection that he has wise purposes in mind that I don't understand. It's not a reflection that he lacks the power to deliver me. That could never be. That would be a foolish statement for me to make so I'm going to affirm his power. I know God has the power to deliver me and I know that he will deliver me when he's good and ready." And you're confident in that. That doesn't mean the turmoil, the external trial goes away but it means that you subordinated your heart to truth and that's where the struggle lies. That's what I want you to see.

Now there's a second response. You affirm God's power, that God's power will help you. Secondly: you affirm that God's love will help you. You affirm that God's love will help you. Really what we're talking about here, beloved, is the difference between knowing about God and knowing God, knowing about sovereignty and applying it to your life, knowing about his love and applying it to your life and reasoning out what the implications of that mean for the difficulties that you face in life.

Look at verse 8, "The LORD will accomplish what concerns me." Look at the "wills." He will accomplish what concerns me. How can you say that, David? You're in the midst of intense inner turmoil, how could you say that the Lord will accomplish what concerns me? Grace Life, how can you and I say the same thing in the midst of our trials? It's not because you see how this works out. That doesn't take any faith. That doesn't take the assurance that things hoped for, faith is the assurance of things not seen. Of course you don't see it, that's why it takes faith. How can you say that, David? He says, "It's because I'm affirming that God's love will help me."

"The LORD will accomplish what concerns me," look at what he says as he addresses the Lord, "Your lovingkindness, O LORD, is everlasting." It never ends. He is reciting the eternal loyal love of God. Spiritual confidence in your turmoil comes not only from believing in God's power – watch this – it comes from not only believing in God's power but believing that his love, his faithful loyal love will motivate him to use his power on

your behalf to help you in your troubles. This isn't difficult to understand conceptually, is it? This isn't hard. It might be hard to wrestle your heart into submission to it but the concepts are clear. They are obvious. The implications of them are unavoidable. Spiritual confidence comes from believing that God's love will motivate him to use his power to help you in your troubles because you're a child of his.

God loves his own. He will use his power to fulfill his purposes and no man can thwart his hand. Well, if he has set his eternal affection upon you in Christ, the only outcome for you could possibly be good. That's the only possible way it could come out. Stated differently, God is not a neutral umpire waiting to make the call on how you respond to a tough situation. He's not a referee getting ready to throw a flag on your violation. He is on your side. He loves his own and he is actively involved working through his providence to accomplish his good and eternal purposes in your life and your responsibility when providence seems contrary, when the winds seem contrary, is to not view God through the prism of your troubles but to look beyond your troubles and say, "This is the character of God. He is omnipotent and he is loving towards me and, therefore, it has to be that he will see me through this. It has to be. That's the only way it could be because anything else would be a failure of his power, it would be a failure of his love, and that is just impossible."

So you affirm his power, you affirm his love will actually cause him to help you in the midst of the storm and you say, as it were, "God, I can't see my way out here and this weighs on me heavily. Oh God, this weighs on me and it's weighed on me for a long time, as you know, O God. But," there's the key word in the Christian struggle, "But you love me. I know that you love me. I have confidence that your purposes toward me are good and that you will eventually make that known and evident in my life, and if not in my life now, it will certainly be on display throughout all the halls of eternity when I am with you in your presence in heaven." That's the only way it could possibly come out.

So you affirm that now before you see the answer. Your hearts rests in that before you have it tangible in your experience. That is the Christian way to struggle. You affirm that his love means that he's not going to abandon you and, therefore, it comes out well in the end and, therefore, that minimizes the need for questions and doubt, in fact it eliminates the need for them. Your heart is just at rest in him.

Philippians 1:6. This verse in Psalm 138:8, "The LORD will accomplish what concerns me," some people have called it the Philippians 1:6 of the Old Testament. You know Philippians 1:6, "I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." David a thousand years earlier said, "The LORD will accomplish what concerns me." It's the same unbroken, unshaken confidence in the love and power of God to carry out his purposes in the lives of those that he's brought to himself.

Now look, beloved, if God offered up Christ as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of your sins, but you believe that, right? If you're a Christian, I mean, that's what you say you believe. You can't be a Christian without believing that. God loved me enough to send

Christ to be the sacrifice for my sins and Christ, God himself, the very second person of the most holy blessed Trinity, stepped into this world and went to the cross and offered up his life out of love for those who would believe in him so that their sins could be forgiven. He substituted his life for ours. The punishment that should have been on your shoulders went on his and now you go free. That's love. If God did that, then he most surely will have his hand upon you through your earthly trials. Of course he will. Of course he will. He's already done the greater thing of sending Christ. Christ has already done the greater thing of atonement on your behalf. Don't you understand? Do you see that that necessarily means he'll do the lesser things that concern you in this earthly life as well?

That's the argument that Paul was making in Romans 8. Romans 8. Your heart should be singing with joy, not your lips because only one of us can talk at a time, okay? But your heart should be singing. Your heart should be rejoicing. This is so obvious. It could be no other way. Paul says in Romans 8:31, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" Romans 8:32, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" Verse 35, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" Verse 37, no, "in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer," we conquer, we conquer, we are victorious, we win, "through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Do you see, do you understand something important? David saw the inevitability of this outcome, the inevitability of God's faithfulness to him 1,000 years before the time of Christ. David did not have the benefit of an historical understanding, an historical manifestation of Christ's coming, Christ offering the sacrifice for the sins. We are on the other side of the cross, we have even more reason, is my only point. We have even more reason to be confident in the trials.

Now, he did the greater thing in Christ. Beloved, beloved Christian, in the midst of your trials he will do the lesser things to sustain you to the end. He will. He will. Your responsibility, then, is to affirm that now, to affirm it in his presence, to say right now, I mean like now, to say, "God, I believe this. God, I believe. I affirm. I am confident that your power will help me. I am confident that your love will help me because it could be no other way." And when you respond like that in the midst of your ongoing, sustained, chronic trials, your soul is rising up to the nobility for which it was appointed; your soul is rising up to what God created it to do which is to trust him when you can't see why, and that is a testimony to the reality of your faith.

Now obviously, obviously, this message is presupposing that you have actually repented of sin and put your faith in Christ. I am presupposing in this message that you are not asking God to bless you in a life of sin. If you're in a life of sin, you need not to affirm your confidence in these things, if you're in a life of sin you need to repent. But if you're

conscious of repentance, you're conscious of not willfully hanging on to known sin in your life because you're a Christian, these things are your birthright. These things belong to you. It belongs to you as much as it belongs to the preacher. The newest Christian as well as the oldest saint. It belongs to each of us equally to say, "God, your power will help me. God, your love will help me. It is guaranteed."

So David has prayed and started with thanksgiving. He affirms God's power and love. It's a God-centered prayer in trouble. It illustrates how you and I should think today but that's not quite the end yet. That's not quite the end. There is a third element to it. We've said you affirm God's power to help you; you affirm God's love to help you. There is a third element so easy to overlook when you talk this way. There is a third element to it and that is that you have to ask. You ask God for his help. You humbly ask God for his help.

Now watch this in verse 8 here. Look at how he ends this Psalm. I love this. I love it. "The LORD will accomplish what concerns me; Your lovingkindness, O LORD, is everlasting," but he doesn't say amen there. He says, "O LORD, Do not forsake the works of Your hands." He asks. He requests. He balances confidence with dependence. His confidence does not become presumption. His confidence does not lead him to independence from these truths, it causes him to enter into that trust and dependence all the more with a verbal expression of dependence and request, "God, please, in light of all of these things that are true about you, do not forsake me."

Oh beloved, I want you to see that God's character does not mean that you do not need to pray, rather these affirmations provide the basis upon which you pray. "God, your power will help me. God, your love will help me. God, help me!" You affirm his character and then you ask with confidence.

Look at Matthew 7 for just a moment. Matthew 7:7, Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?" I mean, a sinful earthly father has enough character to give good gifts in response to a proper request from his son, what do you think a holy, faithful, loving, powerful God will do when you ask him for his help? That's the point. Look at verse 11, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" My friends, you must ask. Passing a theology test is not a substitute for humble asking. Farmers have got to plant and sow and reap, a Christian has got to ask in order to receive. God will help but you do have to ask.

Notice that David doesn't ask for a specific resolution, he only asks God to be faithful to his promise. "God, don't forsake me." And let me say this too and I think this will be helpful: this is not describing a one time prayer and then the turmoil goes away. This isn't describing a struggle that ends the moment that you pray this way and affirm it. Chances are the struggle will be back in 60 minutes, maybe in three hours, maybe next week. What I want you to see is that this is a pattern of life. This is a repeated prayer for God's

help. Think about it this way: if you had a stray dog coming into your yard, you'd go out and chase him away, "Get outta here!" The dog slinks off and does whatever it is that dogs do. But he comes back. You're not going to collapse in discouragement on the couch and say, "Oh, I told him to go away but now he's back and it obviously didn't work. Oh, now I have to live with this dog. I hate that dog but I'm stuck with him because the one time didn't work." You would never do that. That's foolish. You'd go out and say, "Hey, mutt, I told you to get lost! Get lost again!" And if he came back, you'd do it again. Eventually the mutt gets the idea he's not welcome there.

You continue, you sustain the effort until you've won the victory. Don't expect to do this one time and then everything is well necessarily. And don't get discouraged and say, "Oh, the struggle is back," just apply the same principles over and over again. We ask for his help repeatedly as the cares press upon us. We live a life of dependence on his promises and we're happy to do that because he's faithful to them, he's faithful to us.

So it is okay for Christians to struggle? Yes, absolutely when they're struggling in the boundaries of faith. In the midst of the storm, we affirm his power and his love. We ask him to help and be faithful to us. Scripture doesn't promise the timing of deliverance but it does promise the certainty. Beloved, beloved, your Lord will speak to the storm and say, "Hush, be still," and in the resultant tranquility of the exercise of his power you will see that he has honored your trust in him in the end because he who believes in him, the Scriptures say repeatedly, he who believes in him will not be disappointed. When that confidence shapes your response to your struggles, you can know with certainty that you are on the high road to God's blessing in your life. Praise be to his name.

Let's pray.

*Our Father, we just want to affirm right now the very things that we've been talking about. In the midst of our sorrows, in the midst of our struggles, we affirm without qualification that your power will help us, that your power is helping us even in unseen ways right now. We affirm that your love guarantees the certainty of your exercise of your power to help those who know Christ. So Father, we ask you to do just that. I ask that for these people that are in front of me, those who hear in other media and in different ways. Father, I ask you to exercise your power and love in a way that would give them a tangible sense of your presence, give them a tangible sense of your blessing so that they would see that the one that names the name of Christ does not name that name in vain. Not without purpose have we believed. Not without promise have we believed. Lord, we trust you absolutely and without qualification and, therefore, we go forward in confidence and peace in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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