

POINTS TO PONDER

“¹God is my light and my salvation; whom will I fear?
God is the stronghold of my life; of whom will I be afraid?”
— *Psalm 27.1*

“When God, or the sacred virtues and values epitomized as being the Spirit that characterizes God, is our *raison d’être*, then light abides with us and salvation/spiritual liberation surrounds us.

Of course, the caveat is that many have assumed that how they portray God is actually correct; most often when it likely isn’t. People have long justified heinous actions in the name of God, vanquishing foes and oppressing others with no compassion whatsoever – all assuming that God sanctioned what they were doing. We all must ask ourselves whether our image of God is genuinely holy and sacred, or whether it is more of a reflection of our own particular values and beliefs.

But if our motives are pure and our knowledge in accordance with the truth of what is genuinely divine, then there is a light and feeling of liberation which inspires fearlessness in us. We’d rather act in accordance with goodness, disregarding the consequences, even death to ourselves, than to act wrongly and reap praise and longevity. When we put goodness first, and base all of our decision-making on it, we don’t let fear enter our contemplations about what to do or not do.

Are there things you would be willing to die for? Are there values which you are willing to live by despite all fears you may have for so living? Who or what is the stronghold of your life...your light...your liberating grace?”

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/18/2023*

“²When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh— my adversaries and foes— they will stumble and fall.
³Though an army encamp against me, my heart will not fear;
though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.”
— *Psalm 27.2-3*

“I don’t find these words in verse 2 literally true at all. Bad people often win over good people. There are too many instances to enumerate. While it is tautologically true that all evil people will fall/stumble/die, it is essentially meaningless to say so since the same is true for good people.

But what is really trying to be said here? Is it not words of encouragement and perspective to help us to be brave in doing good and right in this world? I’m all for that! I just don’t think we need to exaggerate the truth of our needing to be good by having us believe in false realities about how the bad people will ultimately fail. They often don’t. More often than not, they end up ‘winning’ over the good people of the world. Dictators are the ones with money, power, prestige, and notoriety – not the people they oppress, most of whom are never remembered.

Moreover, when we pit ourselves against others, including enemies, we don’t foster the siblinghood of all people and creation living in love and peace with one another. Why do we need to have ‘bad’ people “fall and stumble?” Why not transform their spirits so that they become our loving siblings? Isn’t that a better, more godly, vision of how the world should be than our simply ruling over them like they ruled over us?

Yet, I can identify with the attitude that it doesn’t matter whether an army encamp against me. Not that I won’t have fears about what might happen, and not that I will be confident in the outcome, but rather that I won’t let my fears overwhelm me or my lack of confidence deter me if I put doing justly, rightly, and virtuously above all other considerations.

When we do this, there is nothing to fear. If we do good, it is good for its own sake. It doesn't matter in the end whether we live or die, for we're all going to die anyhow; but rather it matters that we lived by our highest values and did not let threats, manipulations, coercions, and even uses of force keep us from maintaining our values. We forfeit fear's influence over our lives when we are willing to suffer and die for a cause we believe is good.

Our confidence is not in the outcome, but in our integrity. We are confident in goodness no matter if we pay for doing it with our own lives. That purity of motive makes us cast aside our very real fears; for we see that they would dishonor our character and undermine our values if we paid them heed. There is no greater confidence than that of a good person doing good for its own sake, and only for its own sake. For that is what gives our lives meaning and purpose; which no lesser value can truly fulfill."

— Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/18/2023

"⁴One thing I asked of God, that will I seek after: to live in the house of God all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of God, and to inquire in God's temple. ⁵For God will hide me in God's shelter in the day of trouble; God will conceal me under the cover of God's tent; God will set me high on a rock. ⁶Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in God's tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to God."

— Psalm 27.4-6

"Soren Kierkegaard, a Christian philosopher, spoke of our need to have one value above all other values...to have purity of spirit. This thought is supported by many scriptures, and by Jesus' own words. Here we see that the Psalmist speaks to this purity of motive. 'To live in the house of God all the days of my life' is to abide by God's virtues and values in all one thinks, says, and does, day by day, until one dies.

If this is done for its own sake, with no ulterior motive, then it is done purely. However, the Psalmist continues to describe some ulterior motives for why he acts in accordance with God's values. In essence, he is doing a cost-benefit analysis in which he concludes that living by God's values will result in God 'hiding him in the day of trouble,' 'concealing him under God's tent,' and 'setting him high on a rock.' In other words, he does good in order to be divinely protected, and to be raised up above others. Not really moral reasons, wouldn't you say?

It doesn't help that he imagines himself being 'lifted up above his enemies' and then making a big show of his victory over them, likely in their presence, with his shouts of joy and melodious songs that revel in his position over them. Honestly, that sounds like the imaginations of a narcissist rather than the thoughts of a good and virtuous person.

When reading scripture, as with any other literature, we have to be careful to ask whether what we are reading is in accordance with our noblest values, or whether it is something less than that. We have many instincts as human beings, but we need to be aware whether our instincts are leading us toward peaceful and loving relationships with others, or toward our gaining dominance and superiority over them. The latter, of course, is immoral; whereas the former shows purity of spirit."

— Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/18/2023

"⁷Hear, O GOD, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! ⁸"Come," my heart says, "seek God's face!" Your face, GOD, do I seek. ⁹Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation! ¹⁰If my father and mother forsake me, God will take me up."

— Psalm 27.7-10

"There are times in our lives where we plead for God to be aware of our plight and to help us out. It is not necessary that we believe that God is not present with us, though sometimes it feels that way. Here the Psalmist decides to seek out God when it seems that God has ceased seeking out him. There is a wonderment as to whether God has abandoned him; perhaps even forsaken him. Haven't we felt this way

ourselves? Even Jesus wondered this on the cross. Even still, the Psalmist trusts that God is still there, is his saving grace, and will be more loyal to him even than his parents.

While a comforting thought at times, I have always found it difficult to think of God in these terms as an interventionist in human affairs: as seeking me out or abandoning me, as turning toward or away from me, as being my help or refusing help, or as forsaking me or even saving me. This is not consistent with unconditional love. Moreover, it sounds rather retributive and punitive rather than restorative and healing. For me, God is more the representative of the ideals I have come to see as sacred, and who is present in the sense of inspiring and prodding me to live up to those ideals – which themselves are the saving grace in my life.

I guess I don't think I'm so important that God would intervene in my life when there is so much evidence that God isn't intervening elsewhere. As soon as one thinks of God as intervening in human events, one is then beset with an overwhelming problem of why God didn't intervene in so many horrific human events – e.g., torture sessions, wars, injustices of every kind, and especially holocausts. Why God would intervene for me in healing my hurt finger, for instance, and not intervene to save hundreds of millions of lives who were brutalized, doesn't make any sense to me. It also doesn't make sense to me that God takes sides, since it is a fundamental tenet of faith that we are all God's children. Why then would God prefer or rescue some and not others? That would be showing partiality; which doesn't sound like God to me.

What does make sense is that I'm supposed to do all I can, whenever and wherever I can, to stop evil from winning the day over good. Maybe I'm not successful in the big scheme of things, but if I can even help out a few, at least my efforts haven't been in vain.

Generally, I don't pray for God to change some circumstance of my life; though I do pray for others (though the reason may be that I want to care for them, and sometimes that seems like the only thing I can do to care). I do pray that God will grant me wisdom, fortitude, attitude, and abilities to help change the circumstances of life for the better. Thus, I don't ask God to do it for me; but for God to inspire me to do it for the sake of God/goodness.

Yet, I can't say I don't pray for help when I'm at my wits end; having tried everything I know to do, and still not making things work out for the better. I don't honestly expect God to do it; yet it is a comfort to think that this isn't outside the realm of possibility – even though if it happened it would invite countless other ethical conundrums of why other prayers weren't answered.

Maybe we all need to think of God/the Cosmos/Reality wanting what is best for us and assisting us to make that happen. Maybe we have feelings precisely for those occasions in which reasoning just doesn't make any sense.

What are the questions about God that you struggle with? How does your view of God impact how you yourself live your life?"

— Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/18/2023

¹¹Teach me your way, O GOD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.

¹²Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence."

— Psalm 27.11-12

"Asking God to teach us God's ways rather than having God to come to agree with our own ways is a good start! We need to ask what is morally best, what is spiritually optimal, and how we can live in accordance with the most sacred ideals instead of framing life in accordance with our own needs, wants, and preferences.

And who among us, if we've lived a least a few decades, hasn't had encounters with adversaries, false witnesses, and those who do violence? Sometimes they can be ignored, but often they can't. Sometimes they even have power to determine how our own happiness, job, relations with others, and such may go. It is among the most awful feelings to know that you really don't have much defense against their attacks.

It is then that we need to remind ourselves what matters most: our own integrity. That is the one thing that no one can take away from us except ourselves.

It may be that we are given up to the will of our adversaries, as so many have been throughout the ages. It may be that false witnesses determine the outcomes that we try so hard to avert. And it may be that violence continues, internationally, nationally, locally, and even in our individual relationships – all despite our wishes and our deeds to the contrary. And while all of that matters and is of extreme importance, most of it is beyond our own personal control. There is little we can control in life; which may be a good thing. But the one thing no one but us controls is how faithful we are to the values to which we espouse.

In the end, it doesn't matter for our character and soul what others did, what circumstances we had to navigate, and what the outcomes in our life were that we could not control. What matters for our soul and character is that we were intent in making God's values (goodness itself) most important in our lives; not just with our beliefs, but with our actions, practices, and behaviors. So long as we did not try to control others, hurt them, lie in regards to them, or do any violence to them; but instead nurtured their autonomy to live their own best lives, healed and helped them, advocated for them and spoke truthfully to and about them, and heaped kindness, compassion, and beneficence upon them, then we lived with the integrity of spirit that God would want us to live.

Are we more concerned with our outcomes and successes in life, or with our spirit and character in how we live life? Do we spend more energy working to become financially, socially, politically, and religiously revered, or more energy working to become spiritually and morally consistent with what integrity would have us to do?"

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/18/2023*

"¹³I believe that I will see the goodness of God in the land of the living."
— *Psalm 27.13*

"We might take this statement various ways. Is it a boast? Is it a self-assurance bordering on arrogance? Is it a faithfulness that goodness will have the final say? Is it a hope that what will be doesn't look like what is? Is it an affirmation in a life hereafter that will be more just than the life we have now? Is it instead a projected imaging of how life in this world will be transformed with goodness?"

How we view the world and its meaning and purpose will determine our answers to these questions. Which is why it is important that we think about such things more deeply than we are inclined to do. When we take the time to try to figure out life and its meaning, we make ourselves ready to discover its purposes.

What is your vision of life's meaning and purpose? Has it changed over the years? Are there still questions you hope to answer? Are there ways in which you can live your life more truly to how you see your purpose in this world? How do your relationships with others affect how you live your life? How does your life and perspective affect how others are in relationship to you? Are there ways you can increase your wisdom, nurture your soul, and bless your relationships?"

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/18/2023*

"¹⁴Wait for God; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for God!"
— *Psalm 27.14*

"The Biblical word for 'wait' is not synonymous with our own English understanding of this word in our own time. For us, to wait is a rather passive endeavor. While we may involve ourselves in other activities to

distract us from what we are waiting on, the wait is still for something to happen to us rather than a process by which we are active in being faithful for bringing about what we are waiting on/for. It is this latter understanding that is the Biblical idea of waiting – where we go about the business of creating the reality we are waiting for; knowing we may not bring it about all on our own, but still doing everything in our power to create the conditions that will give rise to that for which we wait.

For instance, we are to 'wait' for justice, peace, and love to become the abiding realities within our world. This doesn't mean we go about doing every other thing but justice, peace, and love while we wait for some divine intervention to bring them about for us. No, it means that we go about working for justice, creating peaceful relationships, and actively loving people and creation with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, today, tomorrow, and until we die.

This is the Biblical understanding of how we are to 'wait.' It is anything but passive! It is calling out the powers that be for their injustice. It is mending the wounds of the oppressed with compassion. It is transforming our relationships so that violence, fear, and antagonism have no place in them; but rather peacefulness, assurance, and encouragement.

Notice that the Psalmist specifically mentions to be 'strong' and to take 'courage.' He recognizes that we have to actively be about living virtuous lives and treating others fairly and lovingly if we are to ever experience the sort of peace that we are waiting for in our lives. We can't sit back and expect it to be done for us; we have to be energized to create the realities we wish for day by day; persistently, diligently, and with passionate fervor.

To wait for God is to wait for God's values to be revealed and practiced in us until, by the ripple effect, others catch the same spirit and choose to live by God's values as well. Will this take time? Oh, yes! But it is what we are to be about in our time of 'waiting.' The wait is not for someone or something else to do something for us. Rather, we wait for the fruition of what we ourselves are striving to accomplish, with a fury of unceasing activities, to actually come true. We aren't waiting for something to happen, but rather for what is happening (by our own actions) to have the desired effect.

Thus, Biblical waiting actually means actively doing all we can do to make what we wait for become reality; fully knowing that we will have a long wait before it all comes to completion, but never giving up on the need for us to be the example to others and the world by our own actions and practices."

— Rev. Bret S. Myers, 1/18/2023