

Bill Johnson: Psalm 91 Praying Solutions in Times of Crisis

Look to God's Word when trials and impossibilities come your way. We must find out what God is saying in His Word. We must turn our attention to Him that we might contribute to the solution rather than exaggerate the problem. Whether we are facing a personal, health or financial issue, an international conflict or a pandemic like COVID-19, really doesn't matter. Our response is to live, think and pray according to God's Word.

Psalm 91 (NJKV) is entitled "Safety of Abiding in the Presence of God." If we learn nothing else through this prayer, the title reveals the real purpose behind it. Safety is the fruit. But the goal is the discovery, realization of and delight in the manifested presence of God upon His people. I believe His manifest presence upon us is the key to divine health—body, soul and spirit. Learning to host Him, to yield to Him, to cooperate with Him, is what He is training us to do in this particular season.

Let's look at each verse and how it is to affect our thoughts, prayers and, ultimately, our behavior.

An Invitation to the Secret Place

The very first verse gives us the key, not just for this psalm, but also for the victory it promises.

"He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Ps. 91:1, NKJV).

The secret place is a dwelling place. It is home, a place of habitation. This is where we find both rest and refueling to

fulfill our purpose. Never is it entered to obtain favor with man or somehow to improve our image with others. It really is secret. Never do we enter to let others know we are really devoted to Jesus. It is personal and private. This is where we discover who we are when no one is watching. This dwelling place brings strength, refining and inspiration for our future. These are the results of walking closely with Jesus.

This secret place may be a room in the house. Or it could be a certain time of the day. The focus is alone time with God. And this alone time builds something in me that affects my entire life. It teaches me how not to grieve or quench the Holy Spirit, which is the presence of God in my life. But equally important is learning what I am supposed to do, which is to illustrate the life of Jesus.

Our Confession Matters

"I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust" (Ps. 91:2).

This is a remarkable part of this psalm because it is the first of only two verses that gives us something to do. The rest of the psalm reveals His promises, and/or how He responds to our obedience. Verse 2 is the place where we take action.

I often turn these words into something I direct to Him. "God, you are my refuge, my hiding place. I find refuge in you. You are my glorious fortress. And I trust in you entirely!" That is a very legitimate practice and a very approachable way to view these songs of Scripture. Our praise to Him is very important. But it's important to notice that in this psalm, the praise was not given directly to God. It was a confession and/or a declaration said to other people. This psalm must be spoken to others.

Pointing to the problem rarely gets us out of the problem. People are hungry for solutions. It's just that they're often ignorant of solutions, or they've been so discouraged through

disappointment that they've lost the courage to pursue them. But that's where we step in to help as a body of believers. Because we are one, our choices really do affect others. We must do what we can to make sure each part of the body we're connected to lives with great hope, great vision and great faith.

Stand with each other in times of weakness, speaking right things to one another. Words of faith and courage bring and release the hand of God into that person's life. Such words focus on His greatness and His value as being trustworthy.

The Promise of Deliverance

"Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence" (Ps. 91:3).

The "snare of the fowler" refers to a trap used to catch birds. Sometimes we experience the sting of being caught in a trap, and we need deliverance. "Perilous pestilence" refers to dangerous disease, including pandemics and plagues. Maybe the outbreak of COVID-19 has affected our lives. In response, He promises a swift and effective deliverance.

This basically means, no matter where you are in relation to trials, difficulties or crises, He is there to set you free. He comes to deliver you from the traps that have been set for you by the enemy and from outbreaks of disease that sweep the globe.

Don't misunderstand me: Life is not a simple Christian formula where we do steps one, two and three, and we always have our desired outcome. This life is a relational journey. These situations are always about our relationship with God.

You and I focus on the *outcome* of things—the miracle, the provision and the protection. God focuses on the *input*—the day-to-day interaction with Him where we learn how to do life. This process is where we are shaped and conformed into the

image of Jesus in every part of our life. In this journey of relationship, everything becomes useful in the hands of the sovereign God who will be glorified in every situation and impart great strength to all who trust Him.

Hiding in Him

“He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler” (Ps. 91:4).

Our place of greatest safety is near His heart, under His wings. This is the picture given to us in this verse. In this place, we find the value of truth, which becomes our safety. The picture is clear. Truth in this metaphor is a shield that protects us. A buckler is a small shield, no doubt used in hand-to-hand combat.

When we come to verses such as Psalm 91:4 that describe hiding and seeking refuge, it might catch us by surprise. Suddenly the courageous ones look for shelter. Yet our strength to run into a battle is found in our intimacy with God in the secret place. Drawing near to His heart is what instills us with the courage to face the challenges set before us.

Not Afraid of the Dark

“You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday” (Ps. 91:5–6).

Some say fear is the opposite of faith or the absence of faith. I believe it's more accurate to say that fear is faith in the inferior; it's faith in the lie of the enemy, ultimately leading us to unbelief, which wars against God's truth and His nature of perfect faithfulness. We call this war between God and Satan—between truth and lies, between light and darkness—spiritual warfare.

The biggest area of spiritual warfare is in the mind. By that, I don't mean it's in the imagination. It exists in our thought realm, fighting over which reality we will live from. Will it be from the mind of Christ or from the mind of all that is inferior?

It is true that often we face different types of problems in the night than we do in the day. The enemy wants to rob us of sleep, as that is the time God gives us instruction. He designed sleep for our benefit, as it is there we find recovery and refreshing. When that is taken from us, our daytime lifestyle is affected.

The point is, anxiety will rob you of the lifestyle of rest, which ultimately becomes the lifestyle of faith. Psalm 91:5 addresses this as the "terror by night." If the enemy wins the battle over the night, he has brought about a lessening of your creative influence and clear thinking during the day. Your voice in some measure has been compromised.

Prepare yourself for victorious sleep. Keep away from things that provoke or cause you to be anxious late in the evenings. Schedule time to deal with those kinds of things. Don't ever go to bed mad. Anger works deep into our souls, affecting our inner being. Before getting into bed, shed the things which concern you and confess your trust in God in all things. Put your concerns into His hands and rest in the wonder of His promises.

Refusing Fear on the Right and Left

"A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked" (Ps. 91:7-8).

Much like the illustration we have in Psalm 23:5 where we are seated in the midst of our enemies, in Psalm 91:7-8, we have the chance once again to choose not to fear, regardless of

what surrounds us. Seeing others fall is not a sign that we will. We are not bound by the failures and bad experiences of others. They are not indications of what is coming our way.

I consider what Psalm 91:7–8 says about the reward of the wicked to be of paramount importance. Please understand my heart on this subject. I don't want to see anyone judged. My heart is to see the corrupt one repent. His mercy is designed for the worst of us. My prayers are constantly for the mercy of God to be demonstrated, even upon the life of ones most despised by culture and society. His mercy is that great. Now, I also ask the Lord the following: If they absolutely will not repent, then please demonstrate your judgment in such a way that the fear of God is restored to our world. But for me, it's a last-resort measure.

The Results of Abiding

“Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, Even the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; for He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone” (Ps. 91:9–12).

The picture in this passage is quite profound. It is basically saying if we abide in God, no evil or plague can enter that dwelling because God is the dwelling/house we live in. Nothing of the powers of darkness can enter His person. I remind you, we are His body on earth.

The angelic realm is more important in our daily lives than probably most, if not all, of us realize. Here is a promise about their care over us. It is foolish to worship angels. It's equally foolish to ignore them. They came and ministered to Jesus when He needed it. They were used throughout Scripture to protect and/or help people carry out the purposes of God. We are their assignment. They are there to help us not

to stumble and to succeed in fulfilling our purpose.

Born for Advancement

“You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot” (Ps. 91:13).

This verse stands out because it's only the second time in this psalm we've been given an assignment. This one tells us what we're to do now that we're protected. This verse describes the purpose of our safety: to help others experience the same. We are given personal breakthrough and a lifetime of testimonies of God's greatness that position us to do the same for others. In this one verse, Psalm 91:13, the delivered become the deliverers.

Make no mistake, He delivers us for our good. He longs to set us free. But that's not all there is to His work of deliverance in our lives. As those experiences of liberty take root in our lives, they are to spread throughout society by our witness and example. Here we are, dwelling in God, hidden, not out of view, but out of the reach of the evil one. And then we the sheltered ones are released to trample on the powers of darkness.

We were born for advancement and increase. Setbacks are merely temporary pauses in a life moving forward. Delayed answers are gaining interest. Every loss is temporary, while every victory is eternal. This is our life in Christ, all for His glory.

God's Response

“Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation” (Ps. 91:14–16).

These final verses of Psalm 91 are God's response to those who

have chosen to make His presence their dwelling place, enjoying the pleasure of being near His heart. It's an extraordinary reaction from a perfect heavenly Father, spoken to those whose sole focus is the delight of His heart.

I don't think it's saying there will never be problems. It's not that kind of safety. He said He would be with us in trouble and we'd call upon Him and He'd answer. To keep it practical and real, these statements describe someone who is "in" trouble, thus the cry for help. The point is not that we had a problem; it's that He was with us, and He delivered us. The whole thing ends with a long and full life.

We are to be intentional in our approach to life. There should be no question whether or not we are to advance. We need His help, direction and protection. But our assignment is to go forward and fulfill the purpose for our lives. And this psalm is there to help us maintain the mind of Christ in the midst of crisis or any such thing. During uncertain times, we must remember that these are the days we were born for. We were designed to be a people of answers and breakthrough in the midst of calamities. This is who we are. {eo}

*This article was excerpted from **Bill Johnson's** book, Hope in Any Crisis: Stop Fear and Release God's Goodness in Uncertain Times (Charisma House 2020). Used by permission from Charisma House.*