

Praise Him in the Storm

✖ If you choose to focus on the Lord during the dark times, praise will turn your worries into wonders.

It was the dead of winter in Yarmouth, Maine. Discouragement was trying to wrap itself around my neck like ivy twining around a house. My husband was out of work and depressed. Day after day he interviewed for jobs and didn't get them.

Normally optimistic and able to encourage him, I was struggling now. I felt tired, anxious, burdened by stress. I didn't see how we could pay our bills. Joy seemed gone from our lives, and hope seemed far away.

I continued reading my Bible and talking to God in this wilderness season, but my eyes kept landing on my circumstances. I poured out my heart to Him but heard no answers.

Finally I shared with our Monday night Bible study group how trying a time it was for us. they prayed for us, but things only got worse financially, and my anxiety grew.

A few weeks later at the Monday group, one of the women, Linda, took me aside and said, "Cheri, no matter how hard things are, you must praise and thank God in the midst of your circumstances. And that's not a message from me but from my

missionary friend

Anne. She wants you to know she's praying for you."

I had heard Linda talk

about this elderly missionary who'd served in China before World War II and

survived prison camp, but I had never met her. The message was a hard one to

hear that night.

"I always thought You

wanted genuine—not fake—praise, Lord, and I want to be real with You," I prayed.

"How can I thank and praise You when I feel so sad inside, so discouraged? I

know it's the right thing to do, so what's wrong with me?"

A Lesson in Trust

I pondered that

question all week, trying to force myself to praise and thank God. I wanted with

all my heart to be faithful but felt overwhelmed by my feelings and drained

from trying to bolster my depressed husband. I knew I was failing.

Falling deeper into

discouragement, the next week I told Linda, "When you go and see your

missionary friend this week, I want to go with you. I have a few questions to

ask her." I thought if anyone could shed some light on my problem, this wise

missionary could.

Linda agreed, and on a

bitter cold December day, we drove to Anne's apartment. We walked in and saw a

white-haired woman in a burgundy sweater laying in a recliner. Her legs were propped up and covered with a small green blanket. Print house shoes peeked out from the blanket.

Anne was almost totally blind, but her spiritual eyes were sharp as she looked over in my direction. She spoke with effort but a quiet authority, asking me all about our situation. She seemed to have a knowledge and understanding about my life far beyond what I shared, and after listening, she offered insights.

“For your children’s and husband’s sakes, you must praise and thank God and *show* in your countenance your faith in Him. For he who trust Him wholly finds Him wholly true,” She said. “Thank Him in all things. Praise Him even if tears are running down your cheeks.”

“But how?” I asked. “I want to praise and thank God, and I’ve tried, but it’s so hard when I’m depressed.”

“By trusting Him implicitly,” she continued. “You can’t depend on your feelings; they are Satan’s playground. Ask for God’s grace to praise Him, and He’ll give it to you.”

Later, over our salads and bowls of soup, I asked about Anne’s experiences as a

missionary in China.

She shared about the day she was to leave Shangai for furlough in Scotland.

After nine years of service with the China Inland Mission, Anne couldn't wait to see her mother, family and friends back in Scotland. She was overdue for a respite. She and the other missionaries had packed all their belongings and were about to leave for the boat when Anne heard a clamor outside their dormitory.

As she watched out the mission-house window, she saw Japanese soldiers goose-stepping in unison down the street, knees almost up to their noses. The Lord spoke to her heart, "Come aside for a minute. I want to talk to you, Anne."

Reminding her of His care and provision in many adventures and close calls in the nine years she had ministered in China, He told her she was not going home but would be a prisoner of the Japanese. He didn't tell her how long but said He would be with her.

A precious but very real sense of God's nearness and peace filled her. "I've never forgotten his overwhelming peace and the Lord's closeness to me in that moment," Anne told us.

Then He asked her, "Do you have any prayer requests to make?"

Although Anne had never

given her teeth a thought, the Holy Spirit nudge her to pray that her teeth would be preserved—that not one of them would fall out. In fact, the health and diet of prisoners is often so bad that they lose their teeth. So out of obedience rather than vanity, she asked God to protect her teeth.

Moments later she and the other English and American missionaries were taken prisoner and marched off to a Japanese prison camp. There she spent 3-1/2 years in near-starvation, dreadful cold in winter and scorching heat in the summer. Cruelty, rats, diseases and death were all around her. There were no Bibles, so she had to rely on all the verses she had committed to memory.

Anne related story after story about God's provision in the prison camp. She shared about His constant presence, of the people who came to know Christ.

She seemed to possess a quiet assurance that she could absolutely trust God. She knew He would never fail her. I sat there spellbound, marveling at the mercy and faithfulness of the God she and I serve.

Anne was released after World War II ended. And although she was in poor health at the close of her internment, every single tooth was preserved.

Now she was dealing

with the present, day-to-day trials of again-failing eyes and numerous surgeries—but she encouraged us: “Trust. Cast all your cares on Him. No matter what’s on your mind, roll it onto His shoulders, and rest under His wing.”

On the drive home, my thoughts were filled with Anne’s stories and the Scriptures she had shared. Her words came back to me: “Don’t lean on your own understanding. Don’t trust what you see or feel or think; trust God and His Word. He’s faithful even when we’re not.”

I prayed silent, “Lord, I want to praise and thank You right in the middle of our situation, and I ask for Your grace to do that.”

The Turnaround

That night my husband was just as withdrawn and depressed as usual, but something new was engaging my thoughts. The next few days in my quiet time I searched the Scriptures, especially the Psalms, for words to praise God. All the feelings of discouragement and worry were still lurking around, trying to drag me down, but I knelt and used these verses to adore Him.

As I did, that deep heaviness began to lift, and the anxiety about our empty checking account lifted with it. It was as if dark glasses were removed and I

saw what I'd never
seen before: that no matter how difficult or trying our
situation was, and even
if nothing external changed, I could praise and thank God
because the trial
would draw me into a closer relationship with Him.

Like a trickle from a
frozen creek in the spring, something deep inside me began to
thaw, and
thanksgiving bubbled up and flowed. Slowly, my perspective
began to change. I
enjoyed loving God for the first time in a long time—no
requests or complaints.

I could thank God for
the season and for the inner work He was doing in us. I
thanked Him for our
health; for our children; for our marriage that was still
together (the fact
that it had been strained caused me to depend more on God);
for the plan He had
for my husband, though we hadn't seen it; even for the
financial losses,
because they reminded me of the temporariness of material
things and of our *eternal*
treasures in Christ.

One April morning I
walked our sheltie down the road. It had snowed for days, and
everything was
frozen. A somber gray sky above offered little promise of a
break in the
wintery weather. I was longing for spring—and also for things
to turn around in
our lives.

Just then I noticed a

rose bush that had been severely cut back before the snow covered it. now it was stark, with ice solidly frozen around it. Our lives, too, had been pruned, and the struggles weren't going away.

Three months had gone by after my visit to Anne. My husband was still having a tough time. Our savings were gone. I thought, *That's what we're like. We've been pruned too—a not-altogether-painless process.*

"But just like this rose bush, you will bloom again and be fruitful," God seemed to say. "Let your roots go down deep in Me. Praise Me in the winters too!"

I slowly began to realize that praising and thanking God—no matter how difficult things get—will help us bloom again. There's no hole we can get ourselves into that's too deep for His love to fill. And the tough times, whether financial or physical, press us into a deeper, more intimate relationship with Him. Just as the roots of a plant grow our faith and dependence on God are strengthened in our "winters."

Are you struggling through a difficult time? Take heart; you will bloom again, with greater fruit than before! Just keep anchoring yourself in Christ and trust Him to bring a springtime of resurrection. He does it for the roses. He will do it in my life—and He will do it in yours.

Cheri Fuller is an award-winning author of forty two books including her newest, Mother-Daughter Duet and The One Year Women's Friendship Devotional.