

When You Are Up Against a Wall

Have you ever “hit the wall” with no seeming way forward? How do you keep getting back up again when it appears to be setback after setback?

I have been in this place multiple times, and I seem to be there once again. Right now, many people are up against the wall.

So in my own search for light and guidance, the Holy Spirit has highlighted some truths in the writings of my late wife, Michal Ann Goll. In the book *A Call to the Secret Place*, I found nuggets of truth in the last chapter, titled “The Shelter of the Swallow.” So let me take a moment and share some wisdom from her vantage point.

Lessons from the Swallow

Of all the men and women in the Bible who came to know God intimately, David seems to have been the premier one who understood what it meant to enter the secret place of the Holy Spirit. In Ps. 84, David paints a sensitive and inviting word picture for us:

“How lovely is Your dwelling place, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my body cry out for the living God. Yes, the sparrow has found a home and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even at Your altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they continually praise You. Selah” (vv. 1-4).

Often, the Lord has drawn my attention to verse 3: “Yes, the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even at Your altars, O Lord of

Hosts, my kin and my God.”

I treasure this psalm, as did my mother and grandmother before me, especially this one line. It has become part of my family heritage. I gained further insights from it through a personal experience.

My girls were taking riding lessons at our neighbor’s place. As the horses were being brought in, groomed and saddled up, I was enjoying myself by watching everyone and all the animals. I happened to look up and see a barn swallow’s nest built against the rafters of the barn. *What a delightful find!* I thought.

My excitement was genuine, because my mother had been an avid bird-watcher and had taught me to highly value these beautiful creatures for their unique qualities. I think barn swallows are some of the most beautiful birds in God’s creation, their iridescent bluish-black bodies contrasting with rich shades of deep orange on their faces, throats and breasts. These little creatures perform like flying acrobats as they swoop and dive after insects in the early evening light.

As I stood there admiring these fascinating birds, the Lord reminded me of the words of Psalm 84. I found myself thinking, *What an accurate picture David painted of their nature and their nests.*

When a swallow builds its nest, it will first find a barn or other structure with a supply of mud close by. It will carry mud and twigs in its little beak, making trip after trip, carefully constructing a sturdy nest on joist, strut or rafter beam of the barn. The outside of the mud-dauber-type structure dries and hardens, becoming very solid and secure. Yet the inside of the nest is lined with downy feathers and is soft, warm and inviting.

The thought struck me: *Swallows build their nests the way they do because, instinctively, they know that the safest place to*

build is up against the wall. Now, we humans use the expression “up against the wall” to describe feeling trapped or being out of options, when we have no place to run and no way out.

Oh, that we would learn from the graceful swallow the wisdom of God, allowing our divine shepherd’s leading and guiding to become such a deep part of us that we can mirror the powerful instincts He has built into His creation. May He weave into the fabric of our lives this truth: the place of abiding is found where difficulty crosses our will and our fear. My husband, James, has often stated, “Going to the cross is going to the point where my will crosses God’s will.” How desperately we need to abide in God by “nesting” close to the cross.

The Perfectly Designed Cross

Each one of us must go to the cross. There are no exceptions. The cross is the place where our will and God’s will cross each other. The cross is always the place where God’s will stands before me—and I am afraid of the pain. I want to run from it as fast as I can.

We do not realize that God will meet us right there—where we are spiritually weakest. If we let Him meet us there, He will give us His grace and strength in place of our weakness.

The truth is, God has designed a cross perfectly for each one of us. He knows the details of our lives, and He knows exactly how to direct us into situations where our natural strength will be tested. He knows how to apply pressure so every natural desire—those forces in us that make us want to cling to anything but Him—can be exposed and cleansed.

Spiritual storms, winds and billows will blow into our lives, pulling us this way and that. Sometimes, in the face of winds and danger, we know there is a place of safety in God, but still we don’t fly to that safe place in Him. Instead, we fly

away, resisting the wisdom that tells us to fly to Him. Why do we all seem to do this? I believe it's because we all know in our spirits what flying toward Him will mean. It will require first going to the cross.

Peace, safety, comfort and rest are found in God, but testing and discomfort are also woven into His design. Therefore, we should turn around and start running toward what is uncomfortable, because that is exactly where we are going to find Him. *We will find our rest only after we choose to nest on a crossbeam.*

David knew this. In Psalm 84, he tells us to fly to that place in God—the secret place, often the place of our greatest testing, known only to God and us. By abiding in this place, we build a strong history with God. Every trial and storm He brings us through becomes a part of the nest. Day by day, He lines our nest with His faithfulness, His goodness, His mercy and His comfort. We rest secure in His strong tower, built to last.

David said, “The sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young—even at Your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God” (Ps. 84:3). We can rest our “young” in the shelter of His wonderful presence also. Our young may be our children, our dreams, our goals, our ministries, our gifts or anything we cherish. The shelter of the secret place is not for us alone; it's also a place for those concerns in our lives that matter most to us.

Do You Have a Nest?

What's so wonderful about David's imagery in Psalm 84 is that a nest is more than an emergency shelter. A nest is where you can live always. Here you can abide in peace whether everything around you is being shaken or everything around you is calm.

Where is your nest? What do you trust in for your security,

peace and strength? If you know the Lord as your God and Savior, let me ask you: Has He become for you a nest for your spirit, a secure shelter?

David and so many others found their rest at the altars of the Lord. And now it's your turn. How will you respond when life seems hard and you don't even know which way to go? Will you allow Him to take your hard place and turn it into your next secret place? That is what I have learned to do when I'm "up against the wall."

Dear Heavenly Father, I come to you in the name of Jesus, Your Son. I am longing to enter a deeper place of fellowship with You, but I'm not quite sure I know how to get there. Help me to open up the room in my heart that is meant for only You and me together, forever. Lord, come, and take all the bits and pieces of my life and heart and make them into a beautiful resting place of love of devotion to You. I love and need You so very much! {eo}

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