

In the Midst of the Storm

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It is a treat to stand up here and see how much you enjoy singing that song and seeing the way that your hearts are into the worship of our great God and so it's a delight to be able to build from that and to enter into God's word this morning. And just to make a very minor, it's actually an important point, to just make it briefly, we're continuing our worship now as we open God's word. We didn't just have the worship and now there's the preaching. Preaching God's word and hearing God's word is a part of our worship week by week and so we worship God as we open his word and hear it taught this morning and I'm very glad that you are here to do that with us here today.

Over the past several months, we've been doing some heavy theological lifting from the book of Ephesians and what I wanted to do this morning was to take a little breather from that to focus on something that is going to be very personal and helpful to you today. One of the things that I love about being the pastor of this flock and one of the things that I love about your faithfulness to be here week after week after week is that you and I have a sense of knowing what's going on in one another's lives. We know the joys. We know the sorrows. We know the struggles in a way that, you know, if you are going to a church of 10,000 people, you don't even know 98% of the people that are there. It's not like that for us. We have an intimacy in our spiritual love for one another that gives us an opportunity to come to a message like today and for me to know that as I speak it to you that it's going to have a very significant ministry in your life because of my confidence in God's word; it has nothing to do with the speaker. As we move into it, this is just the kind of thing that relates to all of us at one level or another.

Someone asked me one time a very important question. They said, "Is it okay for Christians to struggle? Are we sinning when we have a difficult time in life? In the midst of the storm's of life and we're feeling battered around, are we sinning when we struggle through those times?" That question is not quite as easy to answer as you might think that it is. On the one hand, of course we struggle. We face temptation and discouragement. I do. You do. You shed tears. I shed tears. And in the sense that we're talking about it at that level, of course we struggle as we go through life. One aspect of our need for biblical salvation, one aspect among many, one aspect of our need for salvation is that we need deliverance from our present condition in this fallen world. We need our sins to be forgiven, that is the central aspect. We need to be declared righteous before a holy God but there is also this aspect of walking alone in darkness through a fallen world and we

need to be delivered from that and one of the things that Christ does for us in our salvation is that he provides power and comfort in the midst of it. Of course we struggle. That's an aspect of fallen life. Job said that, "Man is born for trouble as the sparks fly upwards."

But even as we recognize the struggle, beloved, we need to embrace something else and it's this: we must be faithful to Christ when we struggle. We must be true to our Lord in the midst of our sorrow and sufferings and the questions that come to our mind. Here's what I mean by that: there are those increasingly influential writers and speakers, nominally under the Christian banner, who will hold up doubt as if it were a virtue, that would hold up unbelief as though it was a noble expression of transparency and I want you to see that that is not true. Our struggles in life, even as we walk through them with a great and sympathetic High Priest, our struggles do not give us license to doubt the word of God. Our struggles do not give us the freedom to slander God because we are unhappy with our circumstances in life. They do not give us the freedom to question the truthfulness of his word. They do not give us the freedom to hold our tongue when like we were earlier singing, "Great is thy faithfulness, O Lord, unto me." When we struggle, we must struggle within and inside the bounds of biblically revealed and vibrant faith. That is the only proper way for us to struggle and to doubt Christ, to slander God, to be angry with God in an unrepentant, defiant sense, to question the truthfulness of his word, that is not struggling, that is sinful unbelief.

So the question then becomes: then how do we struggle as Christians? How do we walk through the difficulties of life and the weakness of our flesh, in the constraints of our emotions? How do we do that? How do we respond to life when we are in the midst of the storm? And it's my privilege to invite you to turn to Psalm 138 as we do that here this morning.

The teachers who encourage people to doubt God and to disbelieve him in the name of authenticity and transparency, are doing no one a favor but for the bank accounts of the books that they try to sell. That is not helpful to people in their spiritual lives and to point people toward darkness and away from the truth of God's word is not helping them, it is making things much, much worse. What we're going to do here this morning is that we're going to look simply and clearly into God's word, into the clarity of God's character and see what that means for us as redeemed people as we go through the inevitable deep waters of life.

Now, Psalm 138 is primarily a Psalm of thanksgiving primarily speaking. In the first 3 verses of the Psalm, we see David giving private thanks. Look at verses 1 through 3 with me. David opens up this Psalm with this joyful expression of gratitude,

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.

What David is doing there privately praying, privately speaking to God, alone in the presence of God, vertically addressing God and honoring him. "I give you thanks. I sing praises. I bow down in worship toward your temple. I thank you for your lovingkindness. I thank you for your truth. You have magnified your word. You have answered prayer. You have made me bold with strength in my soul." David says, "There is a track record, O God, between you and me. There is an element of faithfulness to your dealings with me for which I thank you. You have helped me in the past. I praise you for that. I praise you for your word. I praise you for your character." He's just overflowing; the fountain is just bubbling out.

David, of course, wrote these words under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We kind of enter into the spirit of it and respond in like kind even though we don't speak under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit like David did. We recognize the character of God. We thank him for that. We thank him for how he has served us in the past. That's the opening of the Psalm. I'm just setting the context for you here.

David goes on in verses 4 through 6 and speaks somewhat prophetically and says in verse 4,

4 All the kings of the earth will give thanks to You, O LORD, When they have heard the words of Your mouth.

God, when the fame of your name is made known, people will respond in worship. Verse 5,

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.

In time, we will look at these verses more closely in another time and place but for now I just want you to see how much the praise of God is on the lips of David. Verse 5, "Lord, your glory is great." Verse 6, "Even though you are exalted, yet you have mercy. You show kindness to those who are lowly and contrite in spirit. God, who is a God like you? God, when most men attain to positions of prominence and power, they begin to become condescending toward those that are under their authority. Not so with you, God, you regard the lowly. You have mercy upon those who are in sorrow. You know the proud and you have your own way of dealing with them. God, I rejoice in the fact that you are kind to those who are broken and weighed down."

So he's praising God privately in the first 3 verses and then he says, "This praise needs to be public before all the kings of the earth." So this is a very lofty Psalm in these first 6 verses. And you might think based on what David has said in those first 6 verses, that he had no problems, that he had no sorrows, that the reason that he was able to praise God with such lofty terms, the reason that his heart was so thankful, was that he was in the midst of really wonderful circumstances and life was arranged to his liking and that that's

what makes his praise to God and what gives him voice is because he is energized by positive life circumstances. Let's be honest, if we remember to thank God in those times ourselves, if we remember even to thank him at all, so much of the way that we praise God is driven by our circumstances and the fact that the circumstances are to our liking. "Ah, that's a good medical report. Well, praise God for that. I just got the job I wanted. I just got the relationship I wanted. Praise God! Praise God! Life is what I want it to be." Well look, it's good for us to thank God in that but we need to realize that our thanks and our love and our trust in God are independent of our circumstances, that we love and trust and praise him at all times whether the circumstances are to our liking or whether they are not to our liking and this Psalm drives that point home to us with clarity because David is not praying, David is not praising God because his circumstances are good. He's praising him even though his circumstances are bad.

Look at the last 2 verses of the Psalm and this is where we will pick up our exposition and these are the 2 verses that we'll really focus on today. The contrast is almost jarring but this is a common way for the Psalms to work. Look at verse 7 with me in Psalm 138 and as you do, I realize that for some of you this is autobiographical as you would say these words yourself here in verse 7.

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.

Do you see it there? David is in the midst of serious trouble as he writes this Psalm. It gives you a whole new perspective on those first 6 verses to realize that. He is weighed down seriously with difficulty and yet when he approaches God, he comes and says, "I give thanks to your holy name. I praise you for your good character and, Lord, all the kings of the earth will one day give thanks to you and you're one who regards the lowly but you know the haughty from afar." You see that his praise, his worship is driven by something other than his circumstances. His perspective on life is anchored in something that goes beyond pleasant surroundings. He is in serious trouble here. We don't know what kind but the term for trouble that he uses refers to intense inner turmoil. His soul is overturning in him.

He is struggling mightily and I want to give you a flavor for this word. Turn over to Psalm 77 where you can see this word used in a little broader context. Psalm 77 and we'll look at the first 4 verses. We'll just read them here briefly. This is not a Psalm of David but the same word is used. "My voice rises to God, and I will cry aloud; My voice rises to God, and He will hear me. In the day of my trouble," there's our 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." That's pretty powerful, potent expression of a transparent heart saying, "This is really difficult for me." And the Scriptures recognize that. The Scriptures acknowledge it.

The Scriptures exemplify it for us. And knowing the depths of the sorrows that some of you are walking through now through personal loss, through relational difficulties, through the medical and financial issues that you're facing, there is this sense of weight that comes as you encounter that and as you have to live through life in this world. "What about this loss, Lord, that breaks my heart? What about these changes that have alternated life for me and given me a different kind of life that I never expected and that I didn't want? And circumstances have pressed something on me that I have no control over? What about that? How am I supposed to respond to that? How do I live with this? I've got to live in this world, Lord." Well, what I want you to see here from Psalm 138 and from the cross reference that we looked at in Psalm 77 is that the Scriptures recognize the heartfelt trouble that we go through as believers so when David in verse 7 of Psalm 138 says, "I walk in the midst of trouble," understand that he is describing an inner distress, an intense anguish that you and I can identify with.

Either we know it right now, either we can remember it as something that we've gone through in the past even though it's not something that is currently our experience, or for those of you maybe a little younger in the faith, younger in life and on the front end of everything that's going on, it will come. The trouble will come and it's simply a question of whether it's past, present or future. We will find ourselves here. We will find ourselves with the tears going down our cheeks. We will find ourselves wanting time to just be alone and to try to think through life and to weigh the issues that are weighing on us. How are we going to respond when that time comes? How should you respond to that now? What can David teach us about a believer's response to those kinds of heavy trials? Well, that's what we're going to see here this morning.

David illustrates 3 spiritual qualities that are going to help you today in what we're going to see in these last 2 verses. I love the transparency of the Psalms. That's why we have taught them from time to time in our midweek study. But I want to say something that I'm not sure that I've said in this context here at Truth Community before; it's something that I delight in saying because it's true but it's also shocking and sometimes makes people sit up and pay attention, not that you're not paying attention. I can tell you're right there with me. But if you ask the average professing Christian anywhere in America: what should someone do when they are having trouble? What should a Christian do when they are struggling? The answer would be: they should pray about it. They should pray about their troubles. Well, I want to tell you on the authority of God's word that sometimes the worst thing that you can do in the midst of your struggles is to pray about your problem. Does it shock you that I would say such a thing? That a man professing to be a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ would counsel you against praying in the midst of your problems? Yes, that is what I said. Yes, I affirm it in this sense: if all that you're going to do when you pray is along these lines, "God, I'm in a bad situation. I don't know what to do. I'm so very discouraged. If there's anything that you can do to help me, please do but I'm giving up hope. If you can help me, please do. Amen." If that's how a man is going to pray, if that's how a woman is going to pray, focused on the problem, not bringing the character of God to bear, not showing any sense of trust in the prayer but simply crying out in the dark without any sense as if the Bible had never been written, if you're going to pray like that, then yes it's better for you not to pray because your prayer

simply becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, "This is bad and I'm focused on what's bad," and you get up and you're in no better condition than where you started. I suppose at one level that's better than not praying at all but not by much. You see, that's such a low level spiritually to exist at. That's such a dishonor to enter into the presence of the glorious God and to just simply spout out despair without any sense of recognizing who it is that you are talking to.

How do we rise above that? How do we rise above that kind of defeated attitude even in prayer? Really, we're going to be defeated in the presence of the resurrected Christ? We're going to come to the glorious Shekinah glory through the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and act like it doesn't make a difference who we're talking to? No. No, that's not biblical living. That's not biblical praying. That's not trust. What you and I have to do is we have to take ourselves in hand and before we approach God, we need to remember who it is that we are speaking to. Before you just start flapping your lips, stop and step back for a moment and remember, just take a moment even and say, "Who is it that I'm talking to? Who am I speaking to?" If you walked into the presence of a king or a great leader, in some way you would acknowledge, you would be mindful of the authority in the presence of who you are about to address. Well, take that and multiply it by infinity and realize that's the way that we should be thinking about God as we walk through the storms of life.

How do we rise above that? How do we become better Christians? And how do we respond in a godly way to our difficulties? Well, what you should see by now in Psalm 138 is a very key principle. This isn't the first point, by the way, this is all still introduction. Notice in here in Psalm 138 that David is bringing to this Psalm intense inner turmoil but that's not what he starts talking about. He didn't walk into God's presence and start talking about himself and his problems. He walked into God's presence and started talking about God. "God, thank you for who you are. God, great is your name, great is your glory. Oh, and by the way, God, I've got a really bad situation here that I need to address with you." That's what he does and that pattern, that method of approaching God is what we need to learn and to appropriate again and again and again.

Beloved, if this is new to you, I promise you that this is utterly life transforming. The very things that we're talking about here utterly change the whole way that you deal with life and that's what we would expect, isn't it? If this is really God's word, if this is really the word of our Creator that reveals to us our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, if this is the word that can redirect our eternal destinies by what it says about the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, then we would expect it to be life transforming and not simply a storybook that we read like the newspaper and then go on and then still have to find out a way to deal with life. If the Bible is what we say it is, it is God's holy word, it is living, active, sharper than any two-edged sword, then we should find in it something that transforms the way that we live.

Well, that's what we find. That's what we find right here in Psalm 138. So David gives us a pattern, beloved. David gives us some of the clearest, most basic things for us to think about and when we take his pattern and follow it, it won't necessarily change the

circumstances but that's not the point. The point is that we would be changed as we go into the presence of God. Go from one who is tempted to doubt, tempted to despair and come out of the presence of God with a different perspective. Here's the point: sometimes, beloved, what you need is the simplest of principles. The things that are most obvious, that are clear, that are direct and these are the things that will shape your whole foundation. It's how you frame the picture that is going to determine how you look at it and that's what David does for us here in Psalm 138.

What does David do in those 2 verses, 7 and 8? He does this, he teaches us, first of all, when you're in struggle with where you're at right now, here's the first thing that you need to do, the first point here: affirm God's power will help you. Affirm that God's power will help you. This is counter-intuitive. This is contrary to much of the popular teaching that passes for biblical teaching today. This is counter-intuitive but when you are in the midst of your trial, when you are struggling the most, that is when you must affirm and express confidence in your trial. That's when you must rise above the circumstances and say, "I will not walk by sight here. I will not walk by what I see around me. I will walk by faith in what I know to be true about God and his word."

So as you find yourself today in the midst of conflict and weakness and buckling under, what you do is you express this kind of confidence that David models for us in verse 7. Look at the verse with me again. David says, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me." I think the SV says, "You preserve me." One saying it's a future statement of confidence, one saying a present recognition that right now you're helping me. But either way that you translate it, in the midst of the trouble, David makes a declarative statement, "God, I know who you are and I know what you will do in the outcome of this situation. You will revive me. You will keep me. You will strengthen me. How do I know that? It's because you are a great God who regards the lowly and the contrite in spirit," so that you are now defining the way that you're looking at the situation, not through the weight of the trial that you probably in many cases don't have any control over, but rather through the unseen realities of who God is and how he deals with his children.

Look at the end of verse 7 there, "You will stretch forth Your hand against the wrath of my enemies." God's hand, we've said this before, God's hand is a symbol for his power. David is saying, "You will stretch forth your power against my enemies. Those who are creating the problem against the situations that I am dealing with, God, I am confident that you will exercise your power in a way that will assist me. That you who are a God of strength, a God of power, a God of energy, a God of might, you who are my God, God, I'm telling you now before the situation changes, I'm telling you now before that tears are dried on my cheek, I'm telling you now before I see where the resources come from, I'm telling you right now, God, that I trust you, that I am confident in your power to help me in this situation." David is persuaded that God would one day act in a way that would defeat his enemies and here's the key: David is now relying on that power to revive him in the midst of the inner turmoil that he is facing.

Beloved, this is where we take theology and make it personal. If I did an interview with you privately apart from any context of what was going on in your life, most of you if not all of you would in one degree or another say, "God is mighty. God is sovereign. God is strong. I believe that, Pastor." And good for you. That is what you should believe. That is exactly the way that you should think about God. Where the disconnect comes in for us is that we leave that in the realm of theory rather than letting it define the way we interpret life. If your God really is all powerful, then the situation cannot possibly be hopeless. The situation could not possibly be left to your weakness. Because God is powerful, because he reigns over his children, because he reigns over life, because he reigns over the universe, because he reigns over history by that great power that you and I both confess, then that completely redefines the way that you look at your circumstances. All of a sudden, all of a sudden the power of God means something definitive and certain for you. This trouble that you find yourself walking through, whatever else we say about it, this problem is temporary. It is not a permanent condition of life for the child of God because God is over all of that.

You see, we're talking about a whole way to think. We're talking about an entire way to shape the way that your mind operates is what we're talking about today. And even in the best of churches, even the best of people are prone to define life looking at it through the way that they understand their circumstances, the way that life is shaped right now and what they can see ahead of them and you can recognize them because they're up and down, they're up and down. Circumstances are good, I'm up. They are down, I'm bad. And it's a reflection, that up and down nature of things, is a reflection of the fact that they haven't learned yet to think in terms of first principles and how they approach life. Our defining cornerstone principle of thinking about life is that God is sovereign. "He is sovereign over my good times and he is sovereign over my bad times and that affects the way that I think about the bad times. God has for some reason measured this out to me in a way that he deems wise but the sorrow is not an indication that he has lost control or that this is the way life is always going to be for me in perpetuity henceforth forever more."

God's sovereignty means that there are limits to the trouble. Stated differently, the troubles are not a limit on the power of God. And I say it gently, I say it lovingly, I say it because I need to hear this too but the fact that you don't see the way forward in your situation is no restraint on God. It is no indication. It has nothing to do with the ultimate outcome of your situation in life. It has nothing to do with that. Your perception has nothing to do with it. You can just see one step in front you. Well, just acknowledge that. Acknowledge, "God, I don't see the whole picture. I don't see the beginning from the end. I just see this little sliver that hurts right now pretty bad but, God, you see it all. You reign over at all. You literally stopped seas from raging. You literally spoke the world's into existence. You literally raised men from the dead, O God. Your power changes my perspective," is what you say.

So, when Scripture says in Philippians 4 that we are "to think on what is true and honorable and right and pure and lovely and of good repute, if there is any excellence and anything worthy of praise, think on these things." Beloved, what you must do, you must

get control of your thoughts. You cannot let your anxieties run away with you until you are viewing life from a way that is contrary to what the Bible says to be true. I say this to help you, not to rebuke you and there is no one that I have in mind anyway as I'm saying this. We're talking about principles not people here. You see, I haven't said this enough at Truth Community. I need to say this more and more. Your first responsibility is to preach to yourself. When you find yourself sinking and discouraged, you must preach to yourself and not let your anxious thoughts multiply and run away with you, not to get carried away with speculation and what happens if this or that. No, you grab control of your thoughts and you say, "No, I will remember what's true and what is true is that God will revive me. God will stretch forth his power against the wrath of my enemies. God is a God worthy of praise and that will define the way that I view life."

It changes everything but the power of that as the Spirit of God works through his word to apply this to your heart, you have to engage it. You have to talk to yourself that way and not let your anxieties talk to you. Stated differently: you have to speak to your anxieties rather than letting your anxieties speak to you. When your heart starts to bubble up in fear and concern and dread, you step up and say, "No. God, your power will revive me. I'm not going to let these anxieties carry me away and live an anxious, fretful, fearful life because I don't know the future. God, my God, you're a God of power and you will revive me."

So take your theology and make it personal. God is sovereign. You believe that, don't you? You do. That's why most of you are here. Now, go another step and say, "Because God is sovereign, my trial does not overwhelm him. I'm confident in him. I don't need to know the outcome. I don't need to know what happened to that loved one who passed on before me. I don't need to know answers because I know who God is. I know that he's sovereign and that defines everything else for me. I view everything through that lens. I'm going to put on God-colored glasses and I'm going to see life through those glasses rather than letting my heart pretend that God doesn't exist." Don't let your heart do that to you. Speak to your heart. Speak truth to your heart. Preach to yourself. Say, "No, this is what I believe. I believe that God's power will help me and it's only a question of time and circumstance, not ultimate reality."

So, secondly, it's not just a question of power, the balance in David's thinking here is remarkable. David gives us a second response here. You affirm that God's power will help you and simultaneously you affirm that God's love will help you and this is the part that we really need to zero in on and focus on. Trust comes from not only believing in God's power but also believing in his love. His love. His concern for us means that he will certainly be motivated to use that great power to help us in our trials. It's one thing to know somebody who is wealthy but if they are not motivated by love and concern for you, their resources will be of no value to you. With God, he's got all the resources necessary to address the situation and what you need to understand on the other hand is that his character, his lovely attributes, his perfection of who he is is such that his love means that he will gladly use his power to help you whether in a little time or a long time. The timing of it is indifferent to the reality that God's love will cause him to exercise his power on your behalf.

You must believe that if you're a Christian. You must believe that. You must affirm that if you're a Christian at all because to be a Christian means you affirm this word. Well, this is what God's word teaches: he loves his people and he uses his power to protect and preserve them. It's simple. This is not complicated theology. These are the basics of what it means to know God, to walk with him and to trust him. God's love will help you and you preach that to yourself. You affirm that in the presence of God.

Look at verse 8, and even speak it to others in the midst of your trials like some of you are so faithful to do. Verse 8, "The LORD will accomplish what concerns me; Your lovingkindness, O LORD, is everlasting." Look at what he's saying here, "God, your love is eternal and it is unchanging. God, you have brought me into your family. I'm one of your people. I call you, Father. You're my heavenly Father. The Lord Jesus Christ spilled out his blood to secure the redemption of my soul. You've brought me into an eternal relationship that can never change. God, your love is eternal and that means then, apparently God, what that means is that somehow in your power and in your love, you will accomplish what concerns me in the midst of this trial so that what would appear to swallow me up and devour me and destroy me is simply a mirage. It is not the reality of the situation. It could never be that situation because, God, you would never abandon any of your children utterly to the destruction of this world, of Satan, or whatever else. God, it couldn't be that way. This can't be the end. What looks so black can't be the ending of it because I'm seeing life now through God-colored glasses. I'm seeing life now through the fact of God's abundant character, his power, his love. God, this changes everything. You are a personal God and you have set your affection on me in the Lord Jesus Christ. You have set your affection on me and you're going to protect me and lead me through this."

Well, what Scripture teaches us is, what we're supposed to do then when we're in the midst of those storms of life, what we're supposed to do is to affirm the outcome before it happens. There is no spiritual victory, there is no valor, there is no courage in fretting, fretting, fretting, fretting, fretting and then it finally changes and say, "Oh, I knew it would happen all along." Well, no, let's not play games with ourselves like that. Let's be men and women who love God so intensely, that trust him so implicitly, that even in the midst of the storm we can stand up and say, "I believe God's power will help me. I believe God's love will help me. I believe that God through his strength and through his love will accomplish that which concerns me and therefore I affirm it now before I can see how it can possibly happen." That glorifies God. That fretful, angry, questioning type of thing, let's not pretend that that honors God. Let's not pretend that way. If you had a child who dealt with you that way, "Are you going to feed me? Are you going to take care of me? You know, my arm is bleeding here badly, I'll probably bleed to death here because I don't know if you'll help me or not." That's an insult to a loving parent. Well, you just bring it and say, "I'm bleeding," and mom says, "I'll take care of that for you." "God, my heart is broken and bleeding here. You're my Father, I trust you to deal with this and to take care of it."

You see, you and I need to be people who love God and trust him like that and let me help you understand why I say that. That will help us spiritually. It will redirect the frame

of our mind and that's good and helpful but that's not primarily why I say it. We must be that way. We must be that kind of Christian because that is what God is worthy of. He is worthy of that kind of trust. He is worthy of that kind of implicit obedience that says, "I will follow you even in the darkness. I will cling and take step after step even though I feel like I'm on the precipice of a great big fall." God is worthy of that trust. That's why this matters.

His glory must be preeminent in our affections. It must be preeminent in the way that we think about life and if in times past you would have trusted a father, a mother, to help you in your time of distress, maybe some of them failed you. That happens. God's not like that. God never fails. But in a normal healthy relationship, a child goes to his parent and says, "Uh-oh," and the parent says, "Let me help you." It's just implicit. Why do we hold ourselves to a diminished standard with a greater parent, a greater Father, one who is sovereign, one who is perfect in love? Why would we be less trusting of God than we are of an earthly, failing parent? Why would we do that? You see, we need to get to the root of the unbelief that's inherent in that and say, "That's not acceptable. God is worthy of more. He looks on my heart and I need to bring him a heart that trusts him even when I can't see." And the way that you do that is that you recite the eternal love of God before your mind.

God loves his people. He uses his power to assist them. He finishes what he begins. Has God started a work in your life? Has God saved you? Have you been converted to the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you a new creature in him? If you are, then the outcome is assured. God will perfect what he began. Part of the way that he perfects us is through the trials but that's not the point here today. The point is that the outcome is certain because of the certain power and love of God and we bring our heart to dwell in that realm even if we can't see. We don't have to see for this to be true. It is true. Whether we perceive it or not is secondary. And so you bring your heart into the realm of truth and say, "God," look at verse 7, "God, you'll stretch forth your hand on my behalf. Your right hand will save me. You'll accomplish what concerns me. Your love is everlasting. You're strong enough to do it, you love me enough to do it. God, the outcome is settled and in that I find my rest even though nothing has changed right now."

You see, we're too quick to doubt the love of God, to question the propriety of his intentions to us, the goodness of his will toward us and we question his love more quickly than we probably question anything in the Scripture. Oh, should we repent of that. God is not a neutral umpire waiting to make the call, watching the slide into the base. Waiting to make the call as to whether you did it good or not and he may call you out. No, no, God is actively concerned. God is our Shepherd. He is with us in the midst of the valley. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me. Because God, you are who you are and you are with me. Your power and your love," David says in Psalm 23, "Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Your power, your care guarantee that it will be well for me in the end."

You see, that is how we are supposed to have our entire mindset toward life and when the struggles come as they inevitably do, it's not a question of saying, "Oh, I shouldn't even

feel the struggle." You feel the struggle, okay, the question is: what do you do in response to the struggle? Does the struggle define God for you or does God define the struggle for you? That's where the turning point of your spiritual life will be found. And as we quietly enter into the holy presence of God, as it were, and realize that he who knows us and knows our heart and loves us and gave himself up for us, as we are mindful of all of that and we enter into the presence, we leave the troubles outside the veil for the moment and we just come into the presence and we drink in his great and glorious character, "God, you are sovereign. God, you love me. God, I am confident in you. You will help me, O God, I will not let go of that." What, you say it's been 5 years now since this has come on? "I'm not letting go. I will not let go of you, God, until you bless me," and you develop that manner of spiritual insistence. "God, I will not stop trusting you. I will not let go of you even though I'm crushed inside. I will not let go of you. I can't see my way out but I know you love me. Your purposes are good and you will eventually make that known, evident and on display and I'm not going to define the time period, Lord. God, if this takes 30 years, you will find me at the end of the 30 years still clinging to your cloak say, 'God, I know your power and love and I will not let go of that. I will not renounce my confidence, my trust in you. I will not let go of that. Though you slay me, I will trust in you.'"

Turn over to the New Testament in Hebrews 13, just before the book of James, just after the book of Philemon but that doesn't really help because you never see Philemon when you're thumbing through quickly. Philemon and Obadiah, neither of those are very useful reference points in the geography of your Bible. Hebrews 13:5, "Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have," here is what we need to see today, "For He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you nor will I ever forsake you,'" a greatly emphatic triple negative in the Greek language. It's as if he's saying, "I will never, ever, ever desert you nor will I ever, ever, ever forsake you." "Don't you ever forget that," is the force of that phrase. Verse 6, "so that we confidently say," look at this, in light of that unchanging character of God, "I will never forsake you," then our response is one of confidence. We confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?" If God is for me, God is for us, who can be against us? That defines the way that you think and the way that you think eventually defines the way that you feel.

When you preach to yourself like this pessimism, it eventually turns to optimism. Beloved, if God offered up Christ to rescue you from eternal judgment, and he did, if Christ poured out his blood and accepted the punishment for your sins so that you might be declared righteous before God, and he did, then surely if God has addressed the eternal well-being of our soul, if he has done the greater thing, surely he will do the lesser thing and bring us through our earthly trials as well. The biblical force of this, the biblical logic of this is inescapable and the biblical writers make this point again and again and again.

Look at Romans 8. We could go to verse 28 which you all know but that's not the verse I'm going to. Romans 8. I want to take you to verse 31 because, again, this is about cultivating a way to think, of interpreting life. This is about saying, "How am I to understand my place in the universe and what comes to me? Sometimes I have control of

it, sometimes I don't and when I'm overwhelmed, what shall I say?" Romans 8:31, "What then shall we say to these things?" These things that Christ has died and saved us and God has called us, justified us, he will one day glorify us. What shall we say to all of that? If God has done all of that, if Christ has been given and Christ is now risen on our behalf and we have a brother in heaven naming our name before the throne of God saying, "That one belongs to me"? What are we going to say to all of that when life seemingly spins out of control? What do we say to these things? "If God is for us, who is against us?" Verse 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?" God has already given us the greater thing, the greatest thing in giving us his Son. Well look, the lesser things are included in the greater gift. That's the point. He didn't give us the great thing and then say no to the lesser things. It's a whole complete package. The redemption of your soul was a massive gift from God that covers every eventuality in life from now until you draw your final breath. You see, the point of this, the point of this is that our hearts would be so moved in response to this kind of truth, the reality of the glory of God in his power, in his love, in the redemptive work of Christ, we would be so moved by that that it would reshape the way that we think and the way that we think would redefine the way that we approach the storms of life.

Look at 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? Just as it is written, 'For your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'" Verse 37, Christian, write your name, as it were, in what this text is saying, "But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer 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," what? "The love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." "God, your love will help me. Christ has already borne the weight of sin on my behalf. He didn't do that for no purpose. It wasn't a meaningless exercise simply to watch me spin out of control through this trial. God, your power will help me. Your love guarantees that you'll use your power on my behalf."

Beloved, this is where the word of God takes us. When it comes to the things that are most precious to your heart, the things that are most important to you, and especially when those things seem to be the most threatened by whatever is happening in your life right now, when we say God's power will help us, God's love will help us, here's what we're saying: we are saying that we are staking everything on that being true. We stake everything on it to the point that we make foundational life decisions on the reality, "God, your power and your love will help me. I will not make life decisions out of fear, out of a lack of courage, out of a lack of trust. I stake everything on the fact that, God, you will be faithful because great is your faithfulness, great is your power, great is your love. I am not afraid anymore because, God, I stake it all on that. I have no plan B, God. After I'm done trusting you, there's no plan B because, God, I don't need a plan B because your power and your love will sustain me through it all." And you stake everything. All of your life, all of your affections, all of your priorities are defined by these simple things that a six-year-old child can understand.

Beloved, when we trust God like that, rest assured that he will never let that kind of trust be in vain. Never. Out with the thought. Out with the suggestion that we will be disappointed in the end when we have fully trusted God like Scriptures call us to do. And when we realize that, then we are appalled at the suggestion, we're appalled at the suggestion that unbelief would be an honorable thing. That yes, you should cultivate your doubts and live in doubt as if that were some kind of postmodern virtue. Well, it's not a biblical virtue. What is a biblical virtue is trust, it's confidence in who this God has revealed himself to be. We're going to be those kind of people at Truth Community. We're going to trust God no matter what because his power and his love are all we need. We have it certified, verified and guaranteed in the written, inerrant word of God.

Now, one last thing. There is a third element to this kind of trust. Go back to Psalm 138. Once you have defined your mind that way, now you're in a position to pray. Now you're ready to make some kind of request when you're no longer praying out of desperation and panic driven by your circumstances but instead your mind is anchored in the power and the love and the certainty and the faithfulness and the goodness of God. When it's anchored in that, now you're ready to pray. Now you're ready to make a request. That's what David does.

The third element to this kind of trust: ask God for help. "Are you kidding me? That's your point?" Yeah, that's the point. Ask God for help. Finally at the very end of Psalm 138, David voices his prayer. By prayer what I mean here is his request. Here's what he asks God for. As you go through Psalm 138, he's not asking. In verse 1, he's giving thanks. Verse 2, he's bowing down. Verse 3, he's remembering, "When I called, you answered." Verse 4, he speaks prophetically, "The kings will give thanks to you. They'll sing of the goodness of the Lord." Verse 6, "Lord, you regard the lowly. You know the haughty from afar." Verse 7, "You'll stretch forth your hand." Verse 8, "You'll accomplish what concerns me; Your lovingkindness, O LORD, is everlasting." He hasn't asked for anything yet. What a rebuke to our selfish prayer lives, huh? How God-centered was this prayer?

But in the end he asks and David, having cultivated all of this confidence and expressing his confidence in God now shows the other side of trust when he expresses his dependence on God. So much confidence, dependence wrapped around it. Verse 8, "O God, Do not forsake the works of Your hands." Notice here that David doesn't ask for a specific outcome. He doesn't put a date on it. He doesn't ask for this or that provision or for the head of this or that enemy or anything like that. It's so simple. He simply asks God to be faithful to who he is. "God, you're powerful and you're loving and so I ask you, don't forsake me." It's not because he's in doubt that God would, he's just expressing the proper dependence of a soul that trusts a God like this. God's character frames the request so you can ask with conviction and so as you walk through those sorrows of this day, "God, I believe in your power. God, I believe in your love. God, I just ask you to use that on my behalf, would you please? And I'll rest in that." The Psalm ends there. The Psalm ends with this simple request.

You know, I like to tell people this: you don't have to figure out the remedy and the solution to your problems. I get the fact that some of them are just beyond earthly analysis, let alone correction. The whole point, beloved, I can't tell you how many times I've held my tongue not in the realm of our fellowship, I'm talking about other areas. I can't tell you how many times I've heard people say, "You know, we've got to figure out what we're going to ask from God. You know, we've got to figure out what the answer to this problem is so we can ask God to do it." Are you kidding me? You don't even know what your life is going to be like tomorrow, how are you going to figure out how to ask God to untangle a knot that is eternal in its consequences? Don't make it that complicated. It doesn't have to be that complicated. Trust is not like that. Trust says, "God, I know that you're strong and I know that you care about me. Would you just please sustain me and help me through this? And whatever you bring to pass, Lord, I will accept with the same trusting spirit with which I ask now."

We don't have to figure out what the answer should be and then ask for that. Would you really trust in your wisdom and say, "This is how I see it"? I don't want to go there. I don't want to pray that way. I don't want to live that way. I just want my walk with God to be such, "God, I just so implicitly trust your sovereign love. That's all I need. Just deal with me according to who you are and everything will come out fine in the end and I'm just going to rest there and get up and move on." It simplifies things.

The final passage I want you to turn to, Matthew 7. Matthew 7:7, Jesus here, giving further instruction on prayer. We looked at some of that last Tuesday. But here teaching on the pursuit of the righteous life, not how to get the material things that you want but how to walk with God as you pursue righteousness, his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you. He said in chapter 6, verse 33 which is just before Matthew 7, "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." What does that seeking look like? Matthew 7:7, "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," remember we were talking about this earlier in the message, about a human child trusting his father, "What man is there among you 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?" Well, you can understand this from a human level. Well then, understand, verse 11, "If you then, being evil," you who are fallen, sinful men, "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!"

You see, we don't just go through the exercise of God's power and God's love and I trust in that. That's good. What that's done is it has framed it so that you can properly ask. You must ask. You must humble yourself enough to say, "God, I ask you for this help." God delights in answering it but until we express it in a dependent spirit, we haven't reached the finality of where we're supposed to go. "God, I know who you are. God, I have this situation. God, I trust you and in that spirit of trust I express my dependence upon you by asking you, please help me. God, don't forsake the work of your hands. What you have begun in me, finish, please?" because it pleases the Father for us to actually verbalize the

request. We're not preparing ourselves for a theology exam, we're living out a trusting, dependent life in the presence of a sovereign, holy, loving, gracious God and this is how he says to do it. "You remember who I am," God's speaking. God's love, God's power and then you ask like a child should ask his father and that trusting, dependent, humble spirit pleases him in such a way that he bestows blessings that otherwise you would not receive just for the asking.

One last thing that I would say just as a practical encouragement to you. Over time, I think I've learned that messages like this, they encourage you but then life keeps happening and you wonder if you ever got it in the first place because you find yourself back in the struggle again and people will say, "Well, maybe I didn't mean it the first time," or, "What's wrong? I'm back here again." Beloved, what I want you to understand is we're not talking about a one time prayer that sets everything in motion for the rest of perpetuity and then, you know, you never have to deal with this again. The whole idea in Matthew 7 is to ask and keep on asking, knock and keep on knocking, seek and keep on seeking. It's a continual matter. This is the pattern of life for us. God brings us to these things and teaches us a spirit of dependence and that's only cultivated over time. You do this, you go through this again and again and again. Sometimes hour by hour, moment by moment. No, no, it's pressing right here. It's right at your jaw and you say, "No, God, I believe in your power and love. I ask you for your help."

It's the stray dog method of praying, I like to call it, at least I like to call it that today. What do you do if a stray dog comes into your yard? "Get out of here!" And the dog goes off and then you look out 2 hours later and the dog is back. Not a one of you would say, "Oh, I failed when I chased the dog off. I guess I didn't really mean it the first time." None of you think that way. You just go out and you say, "Get out of here!" and you chase the dog off again. You chase it off again and again and again until the dog gets the point. Well, in the same way, beloved, your doubting, unfaithful heart is a lot more persistent than a stray dog in the neighborhood. There is going to be a part of your heart that wants to pull you in the direction of unbelief and every time you see that happening, you just respond in the same way: patiently, persistently applying the same principle again and again and again. "God's power will help me. God's love will help me. God, I ask you for help."

It's not a failure on your part that you find that you have to repeat this again and again and again. Lather, rinse and repeat. Lather, rinse and repeat. Trust, pray and repeat. Trust, pray and repeat. This is designed not to condemn us because we don't get it right the first time, it's to set us on the path that we walk again and again and again, step after step after step until one day we start to say, we just reflexively respond that way. "I trust God," you say to yourself.

So is it okay to struggle? Absolutely. When? In the struggle we find ourselves affirming the power of God, the love of God and we find ourselves asking him for help. Beloved, trust him. Trust him and let it be shown in your life. Let your life be testimony. Let your life join with the witness of those lives that have gone before us that he who believes in

this God in this way will never be disappointed. Trust him like that. Add your name to the role of the redeemed who trusted God through it all because that's what he deserves.

Let's pray.

Father, take these things and apply them to our hearts with power that we might trust you in every situation. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ who loved us and gave himself for us. Amen.

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