

Divorce and Remarriage pt.1

Righteousness & Relationships Part 7
Matthew 5:31-32 5-16-10

Summary: The two ways to commit adultery are to look at another woman or divorce, which shows the two sides of love (delight and commitment). Divorce and remarriage is adultery which means the divorce didn't work. Sinful divorce does make you single and the sinful remarriage is valid, but the divorce "didn't work" in the sense that you are still obligated to reconcile. Most divorces are for pain. God forbids them because divorce doesn't bring the relief it promises. The solution to pain is God as refuge.

Matthew 5:31-32 "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' 32 But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

Introduction

Jesus says, "If anyone divorces his wife it's adultery, *except...*" (and then He goes on to give an exception). And there are enough books and articles written on the question of what that exception is to sink an aircraft carrier. Read any book on the subject, read any commentary on this passage, listen to pretty much any sermon on this text and the great majority of it – if not all of it – will be devoted to exploring what that exception is (or is not), and what other exceptions might there be. What you will not find is very much discussion of Jesus' main point – that divorce is adultery.

Studying the exceptions and non-exceptions is important. It is a complex study but we are going to have to roll up our sleeves and do it, because we need to know what the Lord wants us to do in all our various marital situations. So we will plan on doing that in the weeks to come – answering questions about if and when divorce or remarriage are permitted, or if you are the innocent party, or if you are the guilty party, if you have blown it but now you have repented, is there a difference between what God permits and what is actually best, etc. But before we get too wrapped up in all of that, it is crucial that we are rock solid on the main point. Otherwise we will probably go astray in our application of whatever we come up with regarding our view on the exceptions. It is more important to know the rule than the exceptions to the rule.

And as controversial as the subject of divorce and remarriage is, there really is not all that much controversy among evangelicals over what the rule is. Generally speaking, divorce is adultery. Jesus made this point from various different angles.

Mark 10:11 Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. 12 And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."

Matthew 5:32 anyone who divorces his wife, except for immorality, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

So the person who divorces and remarries is guilty of adultery; the person who marries the innocent party commits adultery; and there is even a sense in which the innocent party becomes an adulteress (or adulterer). Divorce is an explosion of sin. And the blast radius starts wide and gets even wider as time goes on.

The Two Sides of Love

Divorce is a sin of unfaithfulness. You make a vow – "Till death do us part" or "as long as we both shall live" – and then you break that vow. That is unfaithfulness.

Remember that in this section Jesus is giving six examples of how the Pharisees' righteousness was inadequate. He began by showing that their effort to keep the sixth commandment (Thou shalt not murder) fell way short. They thought if they did not kill anyone, they were OK, but Jesus says, "No, if you hate or get angry or call people fools or fail to reconcile broken relationships – you have broken the sixth commandment. All that is in verses 21-26. Then starting in verse 27 Jesus moves to commandment #7 – Thou shalt not commit adultery. Now this section on adultery is fascinating because it is divided into two parts.

There are two ways to commit adultery. Verses 27-30 focus on desire, and verses 31-32 focus on commitment. If you enjoy another woman (or man) in a sexual way in your mind, or you allow your desires to turn toward someone besides your spouse – that is adultery. And if you divorce and remarry, that is adultery.

What this shows us is the two sides of love. You owe your spouse both enjoyment and commitment, because both are part of love. If you have one without the other, it is not true love.

If you are attracted to someone, desire that person, enjoy that person, but you are not committed or devoted, that is not love. Where there is real love, commitment and devotion take over where desire and delight leave off. You love your children. You have a baby, and you enjoy holding her, you love seeing her smile, you hold her and kiss her – not out of discipline, but out of desire. You genuinely enjoy her. But in the middle of the night, when you just finally dropped off to sleep, and she is suddenly screaming for no apparent reason – that is where desire leaves off and devotion takes over. You get out of bed, not because your desire to be with her is pushing you out of bed, but because your commitment to her wellbeing is pulling you out of bed.

When you have to be told by Jesus not to divorce your spouse, then you are in one of those moments when desire for your spouse has left off, and it is a matter of being devoted. Obviously the desire and enjoyment part of love is lacking or you wouldn't be thinking about divorce. And in times like that, true love will not bail out just because it is not enjoyable anymore because your devotion to your spouse will take over where your desire has left off.

On the other hand, if all you have is devotion and no desire – that is not love either. If you are committed to never divorce, to always do what is best for your spouse, to always serve, keep hanging in there until death – but it is nothing but a drudgery; that is not love. If you are one hundred percent devoted to your spouse, but it is more burdensome than delightful and enjoyable, then you do not love your spouse. The reason that look of desire is wrong to give to another woman is because you owe it to your spouse. So desire and enjoyment on the one hand and devotion on the other hand are the two sides of the coin of love, and if one of them is missing – you are unfaithful to your spouse and it is adultery.

So if the feelings are long gone in your marriage, it does not mean the relationship is dead; but it does mean it is on life support. Commitment and devotion can keep you together temporarily – from now until the desire and delight are resuscitated. But a marriage cannot survive indefinitely on commitment alone, because very soon it will become obvious to your spouse that you do not like them and that being with them is burdensome to you. And that will make it next to impossible for them to love you. So do not ever think that commitment alone is enough. But do use commitment to keep acting the way you should from now until the rest of your love is restored. And when it is restored – that is when the joy will come.

So love requires both desire and commitment. Looking at another woman is unfaithfulness in desire, and divorce is unfaithfulness of commitment.

The Rule

Calling it adultery means the divorce didn't take

The literal definition of adultery is when you are married to one person and sleep with someone else (or you are the "someone else"). So by calling remarriage adultery Jesus' point is that you are still married to the person you thought you divorced. That is a radical statement, because divorce is the right to remarry. That is what the word "divorce" means. In Genesis 24 the law required that if a man sent his wife away he had to give her a bill of divorce. Many ancient writers referred to bills of divorce, and so we

know what they said. And there were a number of different forms, but the one thing they all had in common – and the one thing that made them a valid bill of divorce, was the statement, “You are now free to marry any man.” That statement was what made a divorce a divorce. It was cruel for men to send their wives away without giving them a bill of divorce, because then the woman was left without anyone to care for her. So out of concern for those women the law of God required that if a man sent his wife away he had to divorce her, which meant he had to give her the right to remarry.

So when Jesus calls the remarriage adultery, what He is saying is the divorce did not work. The first marriage has not actually ended and there is no right to remarry. So there is no actual divorce. I recently saw a scene in a movie where someone asked the main character if he had ever been married.

He said, “Yeah, I was.”

“What happened?”

“It didn’t take.”

He got divorced because his marriage “didn’t take.” What Jesus is saying here is, “You are wrong – the marriage took just fine. What did not take was the divorce.” Any divorce that is not on Biblical grounds does not take. It does not work. The couple is still married. They still owe faithfulness to each other, so that if they get involved with someone else, it is adultery – just like it would be if they got involved with someone else prior to the divorce.

There is a sense in which it did take

That is the force of what Jesus is saying, and if you think it sounds extreme – you are right. But how far should we take that? If you get a sinful divorce, are you still married in every sense? Does your spouse’s body still belong to you? Would it be OK if you showed up a couple years later and slept together? What about if you get married to someone else – are you married to two people now? Or is that second marriage not a real marriage – just an affair?

I don’t think Jesus meant for us to take it that far.

1 Corinthians 7:10-11 To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord)...

(So Paul is explaining to us what Jesus meant.)

10 A wife must not separate from her husband. 11 But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband.

If you get a sinful divorce, are you still married? Or are you unmarried? According to Paul, the person who gets a sinful divorce is unmarried.

What about if you get a sinful divorce, then marry someone else? Is that second marriage invalid? Is it essentially the same thing as just having a live-in boyfriend? No. When Jesus spoke with the woman at the well, He said:

John 4:18 you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband.

She had six partners – five she married and one she did not, and Jesus makes a distinction between the five and the one. He does not say, “The divorces were invalid therefore everyone after husband #1 was just a live-in boyfriend.” All five marriages were valid enough for Jesus to call those men “husbands,” and that last guy was not a husband even though they were living together.

So are sinful divorces valid or not? 1 Corinthians 7 and John 4 make it sound like the divorce really does end the marriage and makes you a single, unmarried person. But Jesus’ words in this text make it sound like the divorce does not end the marriage and you are still married to the person so that remarriage is adultery. How do we reconcile that?

Jesus’ rhetoric

I think the way to reconcile it is by understanding the type of rhetoric Jesus is using in Matthew 5. He is making an extreme statement, stated in the most extreme way for the purpose of jarring our attention and sensibilities. He wants to rattle us and get our attention off the exceptions and onto the main point. So even though there are qualifications to what He is saying, He does not mention those qualifications because He does not want the focus to be on those.

Jesus often spoke this way. Just go back to verse 22. Jesus said do not ever call someone a fool or you will go to hell – that is a general principle. Are there some qualifications? Some exceptions to the general rule? Yes. If we turn it into an absolute policy with no exceptions or qualifications then Jesus would be wrong when He called the Pharisees fools.

After divorce comes the section on oaths. Jesus says we are not to use oaths, and yet we find numerous oaths scattered throughout the New Testament. After that Jesus says not to resist an evil person. Is that an absolute – there is no sense in which we are ever to offer any resistance to an evil person? Of course not. Other passages use that same word and tell us to resist evil (Jas.4:7, 1 Pe.5:9, Gal.2:11). Jesus says to give to the one who asks of you. Did He mean that in an unqualified way? You are never allowed to say no? Your child asks if he can go to Disneyland every Saturday and you have to say yes because Jesus said to give to anyone who asks of you?

Mark 8:11-13 The Pharisees ...asked him for a sign from heaven. 12 He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it."

In Matthew's account of the same event we read:

Matthew 12:38-40 Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you." 39 He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

Matthew 16:5 When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread.

Mark 8:14 The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf

Luke 14:12 "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives..."

How's that for a strict policy? If we handled that verse the same way we tend to handle the verse about divorce, my whole family would be put out of the church because we are constantly getting together for meals, and everyone in the family is always invited. Are we in sin? Or did Jesus mean for His words to be qualified according to the context of the point He was making?

Language is a rich and complex thing. You do not interpret someone's meaning just by looking up each word in the dictionary. Interpretation is a matter of discerning what the speaker meant. And if the speaker meant something as a general principle, we would be twisting His words if we try to make His statement into an absolute, unqualified policy.

Unmarried, yet still bound in that you must reconcile

So in this case, Jesus' statement is very brief. Jesus gives us a general principle, but in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul provides an extended, detailed discussion of the particulars. So if we want to understand the particulars, we go to 1 Corinthians 7. Let's see if Paul tells us exactly in what sense are you still bound to the person you divorced, and in what sense is the marriage really ended?

1 Corinthians 7:11 But if she does (divorce), she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband.

So in what sense did the divorce work? She is considered unmarried. In that sense the union really is broken.

In what sense is she still bound to her husband? Are they husband and wife in every way? No – they are unmarried. However they are still bound together in the sense that God requires them to get back together rather than marry anyone else. If they do go ahead and marry someone else, Jesus says, “That is adultery.”

Does that mean the second marriage is invalid in God’s eyes? No – it is valid.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce ... 2 and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, 3 and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce ... or if he dies, 4 then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again

She is free to remarry any man she wants except her original husband. Once there is a second marriage, the first marriage is dissolved completely. If you got an invalid divorce and you committed adultery by remarrying, does that mean you are living in constant adultery every day? No. Once you get remarried, the first marriage is completely severed.

The Reason

The Pain of a Hard Marriage

So, what is the rule? Divorce is adultery. Whatever exceptions there may be, they are exceptions and not the rule. The rule is divorce is wrong. And if that is the rule and not the exception, then it applies to most divorces and remarriages. If most divorces and remarriages were OK, and just some were wrong, then we would say the rule is that divorce and remarriage are permitted, and the sinful ones are the exceptions. But it is the other way around – most divorces are sinful.

The typical divorce is adultery. And what is the typical divorce? I used to assume that most people got divorced because they were interested in someone else. And certainly that would be adulterous to divorce for that reason. But the more I have been around people getting or contemplating divorces the more I am realizing that most people who want a divorce are not involved with someone else – they just cannot stand the marriage any longer. The suffering is to a point where it is just unbearable.

And when that happens it is usually not too hard to convince yourself and all your friends that you are perfectly justified in leaving. I mean – no one should have to go through what you are going through. And from there we rationalize all kinds of things:

- It was wrong for us to get married in the first place.
- What he is doing to me is abusive.
- God does not want me to be miserable.
- This is harmful to the children, etc.

I do not know if there is anything in life more painful than a hard marriage. It is just relentless suffering. When you are at odds with your spouse all the time it hurts you all day long every day, and it can get to where it seems absolutely unbearable.

Why does God forbid divorce for pain?

If you are counseling someone in that position, what do you say? Is our message for those folks to say, “It doesn’t matter how much you are suffering. What matters is that you don’t break the rules about marriage.”?

Why does God forbid divorce in a case like that? You are miserable, she is miserable, the kids are miserable, everyone around you is miserable, you just do not work together as husband and wife; you do not love her, she does not love you; and you both feel like if you just wished each other the best and went

your separate ways you would both be so much happier – but you can't because God said no divorce. Why? Why won't God let you just divorce? Everyone would be so much better off.

God's Way is Best

Or would they? I can assure you – if everyone would be better off if you divorced, God would let you divorce. If it were the best thing for you God would not only allow it; He would command it. God always does what is best. God does not enforce rules that are in no one's best interest just because they are the rules. We all know what it is like to deal with some mindless bureaucrat who cannot make an exception to a rule that is clearly in everyone's best interests just because he cares more about regulations than about people. God is not like that. God never, ever does anything that is not best.

Deuteronomy 32:4 He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong

When God says you cannot have something that you want it is always because what you are asking for is poison – no exceptions.

Our Way is Not

No matter how right your way seems, or how wrong God's way seems – there is never a time when your way is better than God's way. Did you know it is possible for God to know something we do not know? Nothing could be more self-evident, and yet we so often continue in the delusion that if I cannot see what is good about God's way then it cannot be good. And if I cannot see anything wrong with my way, then there is no way it could be bad.

What insanity that is! If God is infinitely wise and we are not, then of course there are going to be times when our puny, limited, infinitesimal, little pea-brains will think something is best that really is not best – especially given the fact that we not only have limited intellect but we also have sinful hearts and messed up affections. If it is true that God is perfect and infinite and we are not, then we would fully expect that there would be times when we would say, "I can't imagine in my wildest dreams how this thing God is doing or requiring could possibly be best" and it is still best.

Psalm 19:7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

You can trust His laws *never* to lead the wrong way.

So if God tells you do not divorce, or do not remarry – that is best – period. You would not be better off divorced. Staying married is best for you, it is best for everyone else, and it is best for God's kingdom.

Five reasons why divorce is evil

Divorce is like every other sin – it masquerades as something good when in reality it is only bad. And in the encounter with the Pharisees in Matthew 19 Jesus peels back the façade and exposes the ugliness and evil of divorce. In that text Jesus shows us several reasons why divorce is so evil.

REASON #1

Matthew 19:3-5 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" 4 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?"

When God created the ideal marriage in the Garden of Eden, there was one man and one woman – no spares. It was just Adam and Eve, not Adam and Eve... and Ethel just in case. For Adam and Eve

divorce was not advisable. You divorce your wife in the Garden of Eden and life can get very lonely. The obvious intention was for a permanent union between the same two people.

And Jesus is saying, "That is the model for your marriage." When you get married you are checking in to the Garden of Eden. As far as your heart is concerned, your wife is the only woman in the world. Your husband is the only man on earth.

REASON #2

Matthew 19:5 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife

The number one relationship in your life from the time you are born – the parent-child relationship, is temporary. There comes a time when you leave father and mother. But there is no verse that says, "And for this reason a man will leave his wife and be united to..." God designed marriage to be a permanent, life-long union.

And that permanence is a crucial part of what makes marital love work. Divorce is not only a cruel thing to do; it is a cruel thing to even consider. You inflict a great deal of harm and damage on your spouse just by holding out the threat of divorce. That threat destroys marital love. God designed the marriage relationship to flourish in its security. It is supposed to reflect the relationship God has with His people, and God has gone out of His way in Scripture to show us how secure that relationship is. If there is a possibility that you might someday call it quits, that has a devastating effect on your spouse's ability to enjoy marital love in the way God designed.

REASON #3 – One Flesh

Matthew 19:5 ...and the two will become one flesh' 6 So they are no longer two, but one.

The stronger the bond uniting two things, the more damage that results from tearing them apart. And there is no greater bond than one flesh. What if you found out your body was planning on getting a divorce? That would be bad news. It would be a mess, because your body is not two parts fastened together at a seam. If your body got a divorce and divided in two, it would be a horror movie. That is what splitting up a marriage is like.

And it is ironic because the whole reason people get divorces is to relieve suffering or to be happy. You do not have to be very observant to realize divorce does not do either one of those.

We all know about God's famous statement in Malachi 2:16, "I hate divorce." God is not the only one who has said that. I think just about everyone who has ever gone through a divorce has said that. When was the last time someone told you she just went through a divorce and you ask how it went and she says, "Oh, it was a blast!" I loved every minute of it! I'm so happy now. I'm so fulfilled, so full of joy..."? Nobody says that. I got my haircut last week and overheard a conversation next to me. The guy mentioned that he is getting divorced and the gal cutting his hair did not ask how he liked it. She just said, "Oh, I'm so sorry." Divorce promises relief from misery but it does not deliver.

All it does is multiply misery. I have counseled people who are suicidal because of their anger over what they went through as young children when their parents were divorced. People get divorced because they want to be happy; but it does not make people happy. It rips apart what is not supposed to be ripped apart and causes incalculable suffering for the children and other family members and especially your spouse.

Divorce is one of the cruelest things you can do to a human being. If a stranger rejects me, so what? But if the person who knows me best rejects me, that hurts me in ways no one else can hurt me. If someone in business makes you a promise and then breaks it, that might cost you some money. You lose whatever you risked by trusting that promise. But think of what your spouse risked on the promise you made on your wedding day. They gave up their singleness, gave you their youth, gave you their body – their whole life. They risked all that on the confidence that you would be faithful to your promise. By marrying your spouse you took something from them that can never be given back.

REASON #4

Matthew 19:6 ...Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

Divorce is bad because it is man undoing what God has done. Why would you do that? How can you defend undoing God's work? We would not delete words from Scripture. We would not give Goliath victory over David. We would not try to sink Noah's Ark. We would not try to unmake the creation. Why would we ever want to do violence to the work of God?

The Sanctity of God

Divorce is to marriage what abortion is to pregnancy. Divorce is a marriage abortion. And it is wrong for the same reason abortion is wrong. And that is not because of the sanctity of life, by the way. The reason abortion is evil is not because of the sanctity of human life. Human life is not, in and of itself, holy. If a human being dies that is not a moral evil if nobody breaks a command of God (for example if the person dies of natural causes). The reason abortion is evil is because God has commanded that we not kill innocent human beings. It is evil because it is disobedience to God. The reason we ought not to kill our children is not because of the sanctity of life; it is because of the sanctity of God.

God has given us the prerogative of choosing to bring about a human life. A man and wife can decide to conceive a child whenever they want. We are free to make that decision; but we are not free to decide to end that life. And it is the same with marriage. God lets us decide if we want to get married or not. That is up to us. However He lets us know that starting a marriage is like starting a human life – you can decide if you want to bring it into existence, but once it exists it is not your prerogative to destroy it.

If you have a child, and it turns out that child is a lot of trouble to raise – the child hits his teen years and you discover that he is creating a lot of hardship and pain in your life, you don't say, "Well, my only choice is to kill him." You don't say, "I know God wants me to be happy. I know God would not want me to go through life miserable, therefore my only option is to kill my child." We do not have thoughts like that because we understand that ending someone's life is not our prerogative. And neither is ending a marriage.

Reason #5

One final insight we can gain about marriage comes from the word **joined** in verse 6. It literally means "yoked." Of all the illustrations and word pictures Jesus could have used to describe the way God joins us in marriage, He chooses a word picture in which oxen are joined together with a yoke.

The purpose of a yoke is to enable two animals to work together as one at a common task that neither could do by itself. (In fact, I read this week that two oxen joined together can pull more weight than the combined weight that they could each pull separately. So if each one can pull five hundred pounds, together they can pull more than one thousand pounds.)

The unity of marriage is a joining together, done by God, for the purpose of enabling the man and woman to work together at a common task. Marriage is not just for companionship. God has given you a task – over one thousand pounds to pull, and to do that you need your spouse. If you break free of the yoke, how are you going to complete the task God has given you?

The Refuge

What about the pain?

So, divorce is evil, it is damaging, it is cruel, it is destructive, and it is forbidden by God. It is not the solution to our marriage problems. And for many people that is devastating news because it seems like if divorce is not the solution, then there is no solution. I can imagine someone who is in a hard marriage or who has gotten a sinful divorce might be listening to this sermon and feeling despair and hopelessness. Either that or anger. Or maybe resistance – you find yourself trying to find loopholes or exceptions or

flaws in my reasoning or something that would make what I am saying not true. Divorce or remarriage seems like your only hope for happiness, and if you cannot have that, you think, *So I'm just doomed to a miserable life?*

No. Divorce is not the solution, but there is a solution to the agony of a hard marriage. There is a solution to any kind of agony. No matter what is causing your suffering – whether it be a hard marriage, or a physical problem, or an emotional problem, or consequences of bad decisions, or various disappointments, or whatever – there is a solution to the pain of any suffering.

The solution is not relief

The solution to our suffering is a wonderful and satisfying solution, but it is a solution that is hard for people to accept because it does not always involve relief from the suffering. Relief from suffering is not all it is cracked up to be. Very often we are just as miserable after we get relief as we were while we were suffering. We think the solution is for the pain to come to an end, but bringing pain to an end is not the source of joy. You can bring the pain to an end, get out of the marriage, marry that other person you think will be so much better – get rid of everything that is causing all your distress – you can do all that and still be just as depressed and unhappy and miserable as ever.

Experience God as Refuge

The solution to the pain is to find refuge in God. Someday in heaven you will have one hundred percent relief from all your suffering. But until then our hope is not in relief – it is in God as our refuge. The word “refuge” implies the trouble is still ongoing.

Psalm 57:1 I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed.

A refuge gives you a place of rest in the midst of the trouble. And twenty-five times in the book of Psalms God is called our Refuge.

The last two weeks we talked about the joy and satisfaction of soul that comes from fellowship with God. That joy is more satisfying than the pleasure of sin. Having joy and contentment and ability to enjoy good things while forgoing some earthly pleasure is more satisfying right now than having that pleasure but no joy, encouragement, strength, etc. Or if you want it in a simple statement – wouldn't you rather be in a good mood and forgo the pleasure of sin than be depressed and have that pleasure?

That same joy and satisfaction is also our hope in times of suffering. You can have the happiness you crave – not by eliminating the source of your suffering, but by experiencing God as a refuge in the midst of your suffering. But to do that you have to give up every other earthly refuge.

Psalm 118:8 It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.

You can do one or the other. You can look to God as your refuge or you can look to some human solution – like divorce. Or an affair. Or some distraction. But as long as we are looking to earthly things for refuge we will never experience God as our refuge. The only way to experience God as our refuge is to abandon all other refuges and take refuge in God.

You do that when you say, “OK God, I believe that I do not need anything besides the experience of Your presence to be happy. If nothing else changes, but I experience Your nearness and favor, I will be happy” (and you really believe that). But as long as we are leaning on or longing for or putting our hope in some earthly remedy, and we think that is our only ticket to happiness, we are not taking refuge in God.

But when we do take refuge in God alone, two things happen. First, God gives you what you need to handle the suffering. The trouble might still be going on, but He trains you how to handle the trouble.

Psalm 144:1-2 Praise be to the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle. 2 He is my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge

He gives you rest, strength, renewal, courage, joy, peace, happiness, contentment, fulfillment, and satisfaction; and then He shows you how to deal with the problem. He enables you to make right decisions and to fulfill His will and His calling in your hard marriage.

That is one thing that will happen when you take refuge in God. The other benefit is we receive the grace we need to have joy even in the midst of the pain.

Psalm 91:1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

So when you experience God as refuge you get rest. You will find that instead of being so troubled and worried and upset and anxious and agitated and aggravated, your soul is at rest, and there is peace on the inside. We all know the difference between having pain that you can handle just fine and having pain that puts you in a panic. The difference is peace and rest that comes from experiencing God as our refuge.

2 I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." ... 4 He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. 5 You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, 6 nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.

Those threats are still out there, but the fear is gone. People in a hard marriage are afraid of all kinds of things. What if my spouse leaves me? What if I lose my kids? What if my spouse does not leave and I have to suffer the rest of my life? What if things get worse? What if I am never happy again? And fear just takes over. But when you experience God as your refuge that fear just melts away.

But that is not all. It is not just a lack of fear and worry and anxiety – it is the presence of joy and fullness and satisfaction.

Psalm 36:7-8 How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. 8 They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights.

When you find refuge in God it is similar to sitting down and pigging out at some huge feast. It is like drinking from a river of delights.

The happiness that you want is not out of reach. And it does not come through divorce. In fact, as long as you are disobeying God it does not come at all. We cannot take refuge in God while you are disobeying God and trying to take refuge in our own solution. But if you trust Him and follow His way then the way is opened for you to take refuge in Him and feast on the abundance of His house and drink your fill from the river of His delights.

And please do not think of this as taking refuge from your spouse. Taking refuge in God is not a retreat from your spouse – just the opposite. You can only take refuge in God when you are walking with Him in His way, and His way is the way of love – especially love for your spouse. Strive to experience the nearness of God's presence through loving your spouse as an expression of your love for God. Express your devotion and delight in God through devotion and delight in your spouse so that you are fulfilling both the greatest and the second commandments, and you will have the joy your soul craves.

Remember – Adam's delight in Eve came from his love for her, not her love for him. Your feelings for your spouse will return not when your spouse starts loving you better, but when you learn to delight in your spouse. And if you want more detail on how to do that, we covered that extensively in the Building a Joyful Marriage series, which is available on FoodForYourSoul.net.¹

Benediction: Numbers 6:24-26 The LORD bless you and keep you; 25 the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; 26 the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."

¹ http://foodforyoursoul.net/ffys_v2/?page_id=37&series=43

Devotionals

Meditation 1: The God's whose refuge is a delight to those in trouble

Psalm 34:8 Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

What is wonderful about this attribute:

Taking refuge in God is at the same time hard and easy. When this world seems to offer securities and refuges that we can see it is hard to trust in one we cannot see. And yet the world's refuges offer no real refuge. They require that we supply all the safety and power. And we have none to supply (if we did, we would not need a refuge!).

But on the other hand taking refuge in God is easy in that it requires only that we trust Him. We do not have to go anywhere or supply anything. We run to Him but we add nothing to the strength of the Refuge. The world's glass fortresses leave us awake and anxious day and night looking around at possible dangers. But the man who takes refuge in the Lord can sleep and rest in perfect peace. The only danger we have to be concerned with is the danger that we will be enticed by the world or the Devil or our flesh to come out of the refuge.

Remind me, Lord, how blessed I am when I am in the refuge. Remind me of how safe I am. The things that have hurt me so much, that have destroyed that which was most precious to me – they cannot ultimately harm me. I am safe if I take refuge in You. The moment I step out of Your refuge, though, I am in fatal danger. I am naked, crippled and blind in the heat of the battle. By stepping away from the blessedness of Your shelter I open myself up to dangers that can inflict massive damage on me that will last years – even for the rest of my life. What foolishness, Lord, for me to ever step out of Your refuge!

Psalm 34:1 Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left. I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips

What a terrifying experience that must have been for David to be completely at the mercy of such a merciless enemy with no way out except for this risky plan that was so unlikely to work and could have gone wrong so many ways. He must have feared that his humiliation, torture and doom at the hands of his enemy were almost a certainty. God had delivered him from the Philistines many times, but this time it must have seemed that it was not going to happen. If you have never had a night this dark it is impossible to fully appreciate how joyful this kind of praise really is. Being in utter hopelessness and then being rescued by God generates feelings of closeness to His presence and warmth in being enveloped in His tender love that are hard to put into words.

Psalm 5:11-12 But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you.

What effect would it have on your heart if you were to consciously experience God as your refuge today?

Experiencing this attribute:

The best time to experience this attribute is, of course, when you are afraid. However it is also possible to experience it other times. Even when you are not afraid of anything and there seem to be no significant threats, that is only the case because of the protective hand of the Lord.

Teach my soul more about what it means to take refuge in You. Forgive Your servant for worrying and fretting and complaining and acting as though I had no Protector. Show me, dear Lord, how to lock the giant iron gates behind me as I enter Your fortress.

Think: Throughout the day today ask yourself, “At this moment am I running into or stepping out of His refuge?”

Promise to trust today:

Psalm 34:8 Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

Write a prayer:

Refuge (contd)

Meditation 2: Shelter, safety and Rock.

Psalm 27:5-6 For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock. 6 Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD.

What is wonderful about this attribute:

Dwelling in God's presence (being in close fellowship with Him and enjoying His beauty and seeking after Him) is the only place of safety in the day of trouble.

But what is safety? The complete removal of the difficulty? Is this a promise that we will have completely trouble-free lives? Obviously not. The promise is not that there will be no trouble, but that the trouble will not harm us.

The question, then, is "What constitutes harm?" Pain is not in itself harm, so what is?

The only harm that trouble can inflict is getting you to exchange God's glory for some other prize in your heart, and to prefer some pleasure or some achievement or some earthly thing more than His glory. That is the grave danger from which you are utterly safe when you are in His presence enthralled by His glory.

But when we become dull to the wonder of God's glory, and we see it without seeing it – think true things about it without actually experiencing and enjoying it – then we are utterly vulnerable and defenseless and fall like a house of cards before Satan's slightest enticements.

If you will only seek and enjoy God alone, He will hide you away in the back of the Holy of Holies itself, where not even the boldest enemy would dare come after you. He will receive you into His own house and show you the hospitality of Lot – sacrificing His own Child to keep you safe.

Lord, let me dwell in Your presence! Let me seek You and enjoy Your beauty and splendor. Open my eyes and soften my heart that I might see You today!

What effect would it have on your heart if you were to consciously experience God as your shelter today?

Experiencing this attribute:

David was sure he would be offering sacrifices with shouts of joy, singing and making joyful music to the Lord. But very often for us that kind of joy seems so far off.

Dear Father, I don't know how far off that is right now, but please, at least set Your servant's foot on the path toward that kind of joy in You. Show me how to find it, for Your name's sake.

Lord, today let me see and rejoice in the fact that Your presence is utter safety for Your children. That same presence that would instantly consume anyone else, the most dangerous place there is, for Your children is refuge and safety and comfort and glory. The very thing that makes Your presence so safe is the fierce danger of it. It is safe for me because it is so dangerous for them. You hate evil so much that You will not let it near You, which means You will not let it near me when I am near You.

Lord, purge from my life all the sin that keeps me from that glorious presence and that puts distance between me and You. Don't let me be found defenseless and vulnerable when that sure day of trouble arrives. And keep me from doing that which makes Your presence dangerous for me! Oh, woe to me if my only refuge becomes a place of danger. Keep me from sin, dear Lord.

Think: What is it that is keeping you from rejoicing with literal shouts of joy at this time? If you were enjoying God's presence like the psalmist was, then there would be that much joy in your heart. What could you do today to move closer to that?

Promise to trust today:

Psalm 27:5-6 For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock. 6 Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD.

Write a prayer:

Refuge (contd)

Meditation 3: My only rock, salvation and fortress

Psalm 62:2 He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.

What is wonderful about this attribute:

David knew what it was like to try to fight from a lower position. His many years of combat doubtless found him often trying to defend himself from a position of weakness and disadvantage, struggling to survive against an enemy coming from a higher, stronger position. He knew what it was like to try to retreat while bogged down in the mud, to have arrows rain down from above, to have his options blocked by obstacles, to have his vision limited because of being too low. But he also knew what it was like to be on the other end of all that – up high on a rock where he could see all around him, where his footing was solid and secure, where his enemies knew better than to attack from their lower position.

What effect would it have on your heart if you were to consciously experience God as your rock today?

Experiencing this attribute:

It is hard to appreciate God as a rock and fortress if you have never been in a position in which you enemies had the upper hand, so that no matter how hard you tried to escape or defend yourself it never worked. In times like that there is no escape. Everyone believes your opponent and no one believes you, and everything you try fails. You become target practice for those firing down at you, and you cannot lift yourself out. When that happens, and then finally God lifts you out, it can be one of the most delightful kinds of fellowship with God (if you recognize that it is God who is lifting you).

Father, don't let me forget. When I have troubles, my anxious, self-reliant heart starts scrambling to fix the problem on its own, looking to itself as its own deliverance, with little or no thought about You, confidence in You, hope in You, trust in You - my heart almost forgets about You as it strives and struggles to rescue itself. And the more apparent successes my heart has, the more it thinks itself to be its own savior. Lord, teach me to look only to You as my Deliverer, no matter what the size of the trial. Whenever people believe me or support me in a conflict, teach me to interpret that as Your lifting me up, rather than chalking it up to my own trustworthiness. Thank You dear Father, for the favor that You have granted me in the eyes of so many!

You are my only Rock.

When my mind is stuck in distraction like a tractor in four feet of mud, only You can lift me up to think clearly and focus fully on You.

When my heart is in the bottom of a pit of ignorance and dullness to You, so that the handholds and footholds to climb out are utterly out of my reach – and I look into Your Word and understand nothing; only You can lift me out of that.

When my affections are deflated and depressed, so that the platform of hope from which I can view the vistas of Your promises is a 1000 foot cliff before me, and my arms and legs are broken, only You can lift me up.

When circumstances or enemies or Satan has me pinned down and cornered with no escape, only You can lift me up onto the rock.

You are my Rock.

Teach me never to seek any other rock. Let me not stand on anything else for my confidence or rescue or deliverance from trouble. Let me prefer trouble rather than climb up on any other rock besides You. Let me not look to men. Oh Lord, so often I want to talk to everyone but You about my troubles, and look to men to deliver me or comfort me. I want their sympathy more than I want Yours. And so I just

spread my misery more widely. I know there are times when I'm so weak and helpless that I can't find Your grace without the help of a brother. But except for those extreme moments, Lord, may my habit be to run only to You, and not to even mention my struggles to others. And when I do talk to others, let it be for one purpose only: for them to assist me in finding help in You.

Whenever I have the sensation of needing to be lifted up, let that remind me that You are my Rock. And my only hope is to stand upon You and find within You my safe haven.

Whenever I feel safe and secure and on top of the world, let that remind me that it is only because of Your rock-likeness that I am that way, and let that make my heart love Your rock-likeness more.

If you stand upon the Lord as your rock, and hide within Him as your safe refuge, you will never be shaken. Nothing can upend you. Even though you are weak and helpless in yourself – a little lamb surrounded by wolves and facing a roaring lion, not a hair on your head can be touched while you are in the safety of His presence. It would take more than all the demons in hell and on earth to shake the heart who knows the Rock as his God.

Oh, thank You dear Lord, for giving me safety and rest and security. Help me to take the dangers more seriously, that I might enjoy Your protection more fully.

Think: Are you on high ground right now or down in the pit? If you are on high ground, spend a few moments interpreting your circumstances for what they are – an experience of the rock-likeness of God. If you are in the pit interpret those circumstances for what they are – hunger and thirst for an experience of the rock-likeness of God.

Promise to trust today:

Psalm 62:2 He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.

Write a prayer:

Refuge (contd)

Meditation 4 - The ONLY Savior from the enemy's traps

Psalm 25:15 My eyes are ever on the LORD, for only he will release my feet from the snare.

Psalms 33:18 But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, 19 to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.

What is wonderful about this attribute:

Blessed is the man stuck in a snare who looks to a Savior in heaven. His eyes are in the very heavenlies, while his feet are stuck on earth. His heart seeks and finds the Lord God in real communion, while his flesh and bone is embroiled in some earthly trouble. He looks to God alone for deliverance.

Holy Father, only You can deliver from calamity. Remind me when I am enticed by the world that sinning against You invites a disaster that no one can save me from except the very Husband against which I am committing adultery.

What effect would it have on your heart if you were to consciously experience God as your only rescue today?

Experiencing this attribute:

Father, open my eyes to the many snares all around me. You alone can rescue me from the traps of the enemy. Father, I want to learn to see that attribute when I look to You. When I think of You, I want that to be part of what comes to my mind – that You are the only Rescuer from the snares of the enemy. It seems like to do that I will have to become more cognizant of the snares. The enemy has camouflaged them. I'm afraid I'm oblivious to the great majority of them. Father, open my eyes. Let me see them and let each one remind me of this wonderful attribute – that You are the one Savior. And incline my heart to rejoice in that!

I sit before You now at the threshold of this new day and lay it at Your feet on Your altar. You said, "My name will be great among the nations. From the rising to the setting of the sun in every place incense and pure sacrifices will be made to my name, for my name will be great among the nations" (Mal.1:12). Lord, let my prayer this morning be fulfillment of that glorious promise You made thousands of years ago. I live in one of the far off nations - toward "the setting of the sun" from Israel. Here I sit, in this remote corner of the world – obscure and unknown in Malachi's time, a Gentile who has never even been to Israel – bowing myself low before Your great name, and joyfully acknowledging it to be greater than any other name and all other names combined. And by the gracious work of Your Spirit this prayer is incense that rises all the way to heaven, and my sacrifice of praise is a pure and acceptable sacrifice to You. And in addition to that I now take this day You have made and have placed into my hands, and lay it on Your altar. It is a day when I will have to make decisions all day long. Lord, my resolve is that I will make those decisions all for Your glory and Your honor. I will take delight in living this day for You, because it is Yours and I am Yours. I will encounter many obstacles, temptations, trials, joys, pleasures, distractions, tasks, opportunities, gifts of Your grace, forks in the road – Lord, let my interaction with each of those be an act of sweet communion with You and holy worship. If each moment is a step in my walk, I will take thousands of steps between now and when I sit here with You tomorrow morning. Dear Father, let each of those steps be in stride with Your Spirit – close by Your side. Let my soul cling to You and when I drop behind to follow hard after You to get back in step. Keep me close to You, dear Father. This is a scary, dangerous world, and only You can protect me. Care for me today, Lord. The enemy's goal is for me to arrive at the end of this day a little farther from You. Even if it is only a few inches, if he

can set a pattern of that eventually I will be far from You. Oh Lord, his methods are so subtle and imperceptible. If he succeeds in his goal today I will probably not even be aware of it. Please, dear Father, protect me! Hold me close by Your side.

I resolve to keep my eyes continually upon You. I look to You with my whole being – all my affections turn themselves toward You, dear Lord, precious Savior who died for me. I will not look to the creation to rescue me. The enemy's traps are all around me, and false saviors are all around them. No sooner do I step into the trap of boredom than ten false saviors arrive with effusive offers and promises to release me. The false saviors of daydreaming, TV, the Internet, worthless conversation – they shout their oaths that if I look to them instead of You I will be more satisfied. Lord, please, save me from those saviors. Don't let me fall for their lies.

The worst of all the snares is the trap of distraction. I go such long periods without any thought of You at all, simply because my mind is so occupied with what I'm doing. Oh Lord, please teach me how to commune with You even while concentrating on other things. Surely it is possible for my eyes to be ever upon You. Teach me to look to You. Teach me to look to You in faith as my only Savior from every trouble. Draw out from my heart the expectant look of hope, and the obedient look of service, and the adoring look of affection, and the exuberant look of joy. Blessed is the man whose gaze is never lifted from the divine glory! Attract my attention to You, dear Lord, or my dull heart won't be inclined even to gaze upon the beauty You have revealed.

Think: How long is the interval likely to be between now and the next time you take a moment to enjoy the experience of fixing your eyes upon the glory of this attribute of God? Why not set an alarm or some other reminder half way through that interval, to make the intervals shorter today?

Promise to trust today:

Psalm 25:15 My eyes are ever on the LORD, for only he will release my feet from the snare.

Write a prayer:

Refuge (contd)

Meditation 5 - The guard, rescuer and refuge of those who hope in him

Good morning Father, I am so distracted today. I waited too long to come to You in prayer, and now I'm embroiled in ten different concerns for today. Please, move by Your Spirit in my heart to still and quiet my soul before You. I desire not to dishonor You by dragging the hubbub of my day into our morning fellowship. I want to honor You by being distracted from all that by Your glory, rather than being distracted from Your glory by all that.

Psalm 25:19-22 See how my enemies have increased and how fiercely they hate me! 20 Guard my life and rescue me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. 21 May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you. 22 Redeem Israel, O God, from all their troubles!

What is wonderful about this attribute:

How fiercely Satan hates you! The psalmists did not know all that we know about the spiritual realm. Their attention was mainly on flesh and blood foes. But we know our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against Satan and his minions. Satan often uses people in his attacks against us, but those people are mere tools in the hand of our true opponent. The psalmist was distressed because his enemies had increased in strength. We face an enemy stronger than all David's foes combined, and with ten times the hatred.

Apart from the protecting hand of God our situation would be hopeless. Our enemy would be far too strong for us, and we would have no chance. However, we tend to become so used to being protected that we take it for granted and imagine there is no real danger. It is impossible to appreciate being protected without realizing the severity of the peril that surrounds us.

If it were not for God's protecting hand you would be quickly and utterly put to shame and destroyed over the course of the next hour. Even in the next several minutes, if God lifted His hand of protection from you, complete disaster would strike and you would be able to do nothing about it.

And that means you are experiencing the guarding hand of God right now. God is right here, now, in this very room with you, actively protecting you from deadly assaults.

What effect would it have on your heart if you were to consciously experience God as the rescuer of those who hope in Him today?

Experiencing this attribute:

David asked God to look upon his enemies to see how numerous and fierce they were. But many times we need to just the reverse - ask *God* to make *us* look upon our enemies, because we are oblivious to the spiritual dangers that surround us, and we fail to run to Him and pray earnestly for refuge.

Dear Lord, make me alert to the seriousness of the damage that could be done today if my enemy succeeds in his plans to entrap me today. Awaken me to the danger, dear Lord, that I might glorify You by taking refuge in the shadow of Your wings. Guard me, dear Lord. Protect me. Help me dress myself in Your armor. Draw out from my heart joyful hope in You, that I might be the recipient today of the grace of this attribute.

I have placed my hope in You, dear Lord. So protect me. Do not let me fall, lest Your name be compromised through the failure of one who hoped in You. Magnify Your name in me by protecting me from harm. Keep me from any kind of dishonesty, error or foolishness. Remind me as I work that I am being sheltered from deadly satanic volleys the entire time. There is so much busy work that awaits me today - I fear my mind and heart will be far from You most of the time, if not all of it. Please protect me

from that, Lord. Keep me from drifting. I need Your grace to do simple chores just as much as any other time. Keep my heart close to You today.

May integrity and uprightness guard me today.

Promise to trust today:

Psalm 121:7 The LORD will keep you from all harm-- he will watch over your life; 8 the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

Write a prayer:

Refuge (contd)

Meditation 6 - The only safety in calamity

Psalm 5:9-12 Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit. 10 Declare them guilty, O God! Let their intrigues be their downfall. Banish them for their many sins, for they have rebelled against you. 11 But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. 12 For surely, O LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield.

What is wonderful about this attribute:

God divides all of humanity into two categories. But the categories are not those who sin and those who do not. If those were the categories God would be just, but there would be no hope for us. We would be justly condemned to hell – right now. Those who are agonizing in hell and screaming in torment right now are suffering that way because of the fact that they committed the exact same sins that we have committed and are committing right now. If God judged by justice alone, all would be lost.

But He is the God who divides not according to innocent or guilty, but according to rebels and refuge-takers. The two categories God divides mankind into are: 1) evil, rebellious liars, and 2) those who take refuge in God and love His name. All God requires for our entire ten thousand talent debt to be cancelled and for the precious blood of His own Son to be applied to us is that we take refuge in Him.

Father, may I run to You for refuge from all danger and calamity – especially the danger and threat of Your own punishment (which is the only real threat anyway).

What effect would it have on your heart if you were to consciously experience God as your refuge today?

Experiencing this attribute:

Who can stand before God when He is angry? Even in Christ we face the possibility of angering Him and being chastised in His anger.

Lord teach me to fear that. And let that fear drive me hard to flee from Your displeasure.

If it were a man's displeasure we were fleeing we might run away from his presence. A child escaping an angry, abusive father might run out of the house. But we cannot escape the Lord's anger by fleeing His presence. There is no place where He is not present. If we run out of the house or away from Him we are running right into the woodshed where He awaits us. There is only one place you can flee to escape His chastising anger – and that is into His favorable presence. You cannot flee from His wrath by running from His presence. You can only flee from His wrath by running into His presence. The only safe haven in the Universe from God's anger is God's love. So our fear of Him drives us to Him. We escape anger only through intimacy with Him – no other way.

Oh Lord, what a blessed truth this is! First of all that the chastising anger of an infinite God can be escaped at all, and then the fact that it is escaped by running into Your loving, sheltering, fatherly arms! You are the God who spreads protection over those who take refuge in You. The shield that surrounds and protects me – the only hope of my protection – is Your favor and blessing.

And You do that so that those who love Your name may rejoice in You. Teach me to love Your name, that I might rejoice in You. Let me not rejoice in anything or anyone else. Protect me from taking my own way and trying to rejoice in that. Show me the folly of that Lord.

Think: When you fall into sin, how do you usually respond? Do you tend to flee from God's presence as though there were some other refuge besides God, or avoid seeking Him until His displeasure

blows over? Or do you fall into the opposite error of not even realizing that there is divine displeasure that you need refuge from?

Promise to trust today:

Psalm 5:11-12 But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. 12 For surely, O LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield.

Write a prayer:

Refuge (contd)

Meditation 7 - The God whose favor is our protection

Psalm 5:11-12 But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. 12 For surely, O LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield

What is wonderful about this attribute:

Dear Father, what an evil it is for me to take refuge in You and not be glad or sing for joy over it. If the experience of You as my refuge does not move my heart to gladness and rejoicing, my heart is declaring Your refuge to be insufficient to bring joy to the heart. Lord, do not let Your name be so dishonored! Especially not in my heart! Glorify Yourself by bringing Your servant to the point of being enthralled with Your protective shelter.

Teach Your servant to understand that and to love it. Open my eyes, Lord. Like Hagar, who was right there by water, but it was useless to her until You opened her eyes to see it – or Abraham, who could make no use of the ram until You opened his eyes to see it – open my eyes that I might see and make full use of Your favor-shield. Open my eyes, that I might see this wonderful thing from Your law. I know it to be marvelous, yet I don't marvel at it. I know it to be wonderful, yet I fail to wonder. I know it to be staggering, yet I'm not staggered at all. Awaken my heart, dear Lord, and show me Your glory.

When we run to God for refuge, the material He uses to build the fortress is His own favor. If you reach out and touch the walls of your secure haven, you touch nothing but His pure, unmixed favor. What a blessed condition to be protected at all – but so much more to be protected by His favor!

Since God's protective care is something the psalmists sought to experience more of, clearly it is possible to experience less of it some times than you do other times – which means there is a real possibility of losing the fullness of God's shielding favor and spreading protection. It is important to take seriously the real calamity that the Lord could very well allow to overtake us if we prefer evil to Him.

Lord, let me love Your protecting grace so deeply that the thought of it being removed – even partially – would strike serious fear in my heart and make me tremble.

What effect would it have on your heart if you were to consciously experience favor-protection today?

Experiencing this attribute:

When you pray for protection from some threat or problem, realize what you are praying for – divine favor; the smile of God on your life. Even the most wicked of men desire relief from their problems. What sets the believer apart is the fact that the favor of God, whatever form it takes, is his greatest desire and is all that is required to satisfy his heart. We greatly dishonor God when we pray for deliverance or protection and give no thought to His favor.

And when you receive protection (which is any moment that you are not in disastrous peril), do not assume it is because there is no threat, or that there is no enemy trying to destroy you. Realize that every moment that you are safe is a moment you are experiencing the protective favor of God.

Think: Take a moment to consider some of the horrific things that would be happening to you if God withdrew His protective hand.

Promise to trust today:

Psalm 5:12 For surely, O LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield

Write a prayer:

Refuge (contd)

Meditation 8: The God who delivers from both dangers and fears

Psalm 34:4-7 I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. 5 Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. 6 This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. 7 The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

What is wonderful about this attribute:

4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.

The Lord delivers us not only from our troubles but also from our fears. And the latter is often a greater deliverance than the former. Compared to our troubles, sometimes our fears concerning the future are much worse. It's amazing how the Lord can dispel even the worst fears simply by opening your heart to believe a promise like Matthew 6:24ff, where Jesus reminds us that we are much more important than the birds and the grass, both of which God cares for every day.

I trust You dear Lord. I have lots of unanswered questions at this time, and every one of them is far beyond me to figure out. I can do nothing but trust You, and I want to do nothing but trust You. Thank You, Oh Lord, that I can rely on Your promises so completely!

What effect would it have on your heart if you were to consciously experience God as deliverer from all your fears today?

Experiencing this attribute:

6 This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles 7 The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

The evil one is powerful – more so than most realize. Without God's protection we would be suffer unimaginable calamities. But He has promised that if we seek Him He will protect us, and He will not make seeking Him so hard that it is out of our reach. As a father has compassion on His children, so the Lord has compassion on you!

Very often it is suffering that enables us to seek Him earnestly. When we are not suffering our prayers tend to become flat and lifeless and passionless. Our eyes remain dry, and our faith and love cool. In times like that suffering can be the greatest gift God could give us. The arrow has little power unless the bow is pulled all the way back, and it is the agony of deep suffering that pulls the bow to capacity. Even the prayers of the Lord Jesus Himself came with loud shouts and tears as His humanness was racked with suffering and death.

Teach me to embrace suffering all the more, Lord, as I am reminded by it that it is the very thing that brings me what I most long for – passion in my prayers and humble dependence in my spirit before You.

5 Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.

Anyone who has sinned should be covered with shame. Nothing is more fitting for our faces than shame, and we are utterly powerless to remove even 1/100th part of our shame. We have no power to change the past. And yet God has provided a way for our shame – ALL of our shame – to be completely eradicated! And all it takes is a glimpse of Him. One look at His glory and we will be forever changed. We will be like Him when we see Him as He is (1 Jn.3:2)! One look at His majesty and glorious radiance

and we will be instantly, totally, thoroughly and eternally changed into His likeness – Oh the blessedness of this hope!

Lord, let me have some of it now. Teach Your servant to gaze upon Your glory by faith every day. Open my eyes to Your glory as I read Your Word each morning, and impress on my heart the attributes revealed that day so I will be vigilant throughout the day to see it reflected in the mirrors of Your goodness that You have placed all around me.

Lord, today, open my eyes to the glory of Your salvation and deliverance. Let me see in what You have made and in all that You do today in the unfolding of Your providential plan before my eyes – let me see in that the glory of Your love for rescuing the afflicted and hearing the one who cries out to You in desperation.

And Father, as I contemplate Your mercy today, let it drive Your servant to be merciful. Arouse in me deep compassion and pity for those who are suffering around me. Make me aware of and interested in people's suffering, that I might suffer with them in compassion like You do with me.

Think: Sometimes it is hardest to seek wholeheartedly after God when life is going smoothly. What change could you make now that would prevent the need for God to send agonizing suffering to draw you into earnestness in seeking Him?

Promise to trust today:

Psalm 34:7 The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

Write a prayer:

Refuge (contd)

Meditation 9: Our *constant* Protector

Psalm 121:3 May he not let your foot slip-- he who watches over you will not slumber; 4 indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. 5 The LORD watches over you-- the LORD is your shade at your right hand; 6 the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. 7 The LORD will keep you from all harm-- he will watch over your life; 8 the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

Good morning, dear Father. Thank You for being here available for me to spend this time with You. Please, dear Lord, open Your servant's eyes to some rays of Your glory that will grip my soul and fill me with joy. Let me see You and know You more. Enlighten the eyes of my heart, glorious Father, and give me the Spirit of wisdom and revelation that I may know You better. Out of Your glorious riches, strengthen me with power by Your Spirit in my inner being that Christ may dwell in my heart by faith. Meet with me in this room this hour, dear Lord. Teach my heart to seek hard after You today – earnestly, with all my heart and all my soul.

Warm my heart with the truth of Your promised protection. Teach me, dear Lord, and help me to understand this psalm.

What is wonderful about this attribute:

This psalm speaks of constant, continual protection. How does that fit with the fact that we suffer trials and severe hardship – and death? Verse seven sounds almost like it promises there will be no trouble at all, but clearly there is in verse one or he wouldn't be looking for help.

Evidently this protection is like the protection Jesus promised in Luke 21:16-18, where He said we would be betrayed by family and friends, hated, persecuted and even put to death, but not a hair of our heads will perish. As a Christian you will go through all the perils of day and night just like everyone else – maybe even more so, but in walking through them you will find the Lord walking with you sheltering you from any real harm. You might experience painful trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and sword; you may face death all day long; you will face death, demons, and every other hostile power in creation; but none of it will be able to separate you from the love of Christ.

God delivered David in various different ways; sometimes quietly through providence, sometimes indirectly through people, and sometimes obviously through sheer supernatural power. God's tools for protecting and saving us are just as wide and varied as are our trials. For every new struggle we face God has ten new creative ways of saving us. And most of those ways are not obvious. When He works through people it seems to us like it is those people who are the authors, rather than the mere tools of our deliverance. When He uses quiet providence it seems like luck or chance are the authors of our deliverance – or that there was no deliverance because there was no actual threat.

Dear Father in heaven, You move heaven and earth in Your mighty providence to fulfill Your great and precious promises to Your servant. Forgive me, dear God, when I have attributed that to luck and not to You. Forgive me for acting as though You don't even exist when You do Your most marvelous (but quiet) providential acts. Teach me to love Your deliverance. The advantage of the worrier is he can at least see the hundred perils a day that You deliver him from. You have been so gracious in protecting me that instead of appreciating Your protection I have tended to just assume there is no real danger out there. Open my eyes to see what it is You are protecting me from. Thank You, dear God, for those times when You do let me see – times of fear and terror. They are painful to endure, but if it weren't for them I would never have any idea what Your protection and deliverance is like. Teach me not to ever waste any of my fears. Let me use them all to train my heart to delight in Your protection and deliverance.

What effect would it have on your heart if you were to consciously experience God's watchcare today?

Experiencing this attribute:

For this promise to really have an effect on your heart it is necessary to have an awareness and consciousness of the dangers from which you are being protected. When we think of dangers, we think mostly of all the painful trials from which we are not exempt. But those are not the real threats. They are only the context of the real threats. The real threats are those forces that would snatch you from His hand, that would push you into sin, that would draw you away from God's presence and that would turn your heart cold against the Lord. Those threats that would override His salvation and drag you into hell. Those threats that would turn your heart against Him so that you would hate Him instead of loving Him and despise His Word instead of finding it sweet to your taste, and experience His laws as burdensome instead of delightful, and prefer some false treasure to the true treasure, and became blind to the truth about God – unable to perceive His glory; enslaved completely to unbreakable shackles of sin buried in a dungeon so deep that there is no escape. That is the real danger, and from all that you have access to protection and shelter.

Open my eyes to those, the real dangers. Let me think nothing of the trials that are not real dangers. They are only tools in Your hand that You use as protective armor for me. They can only benefit me; they can never cause my foot to slip.

What comfort would be in our hearts if we could think continually about this! To be aware of the threats and then to be comforted by the Lord's 24/7 vigilant watch care over us. You can sleep only because He never sleeps. If He rested or was distracted for even one second, one of the eternally deadly missiles of the enemy would certainly destroy you utterly.

Think: Whenever you feel fear let that remind you to ask "Is this something that can do any real harm?" If so, you are protected from it, and if not, what's to fear?

Promise to trust today:

Psalm 121:7 The LORD will keep you from all harm-- he will watch over your life; 8 the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

Write a prayer: