

Introduction

All of us have times when our spirit needs refreshment and reenergizing. The struggles of life can sap us of energy and discourage our spirits. If you feel distant from God, dry in your soul, or just stumbling along in your walk with Him, I pray these fifteen devotionals will refresh your spirit.

If you are living confidently in your relationship with Christ, I pray they will strengthen you even further for the road ahead. Either way, may you be blessed over the next fourteen days by the words of scripture, meditations and prayers that follow.

He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. (Psalm 23: 2-3)

#1 Re-Fresh and Freshness: The Refreshment of Memory

"Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done,

Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of his wonderful acts,

Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice, Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always,

Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles and the judgments he pronounced.

O descendants of Israel his servant, O sons of Jacob, his chosen ones." (1 Chronicles 16:8-13)

By definition the term 'refresh' assumes that a person was 'fresh' at some point. Refresh is a verb that means to restore something that has been lost or diminished. In this case, freshness. So the first question we must ask is, does your spirit need to be refreshed?

I would hope and pray that you are walking so closely with God that your spirit is constantly experiencing freshness that comes from intimacy with God and the continual presence of His spirit. However, I will take the risk of believing that for many, perhaps most, alright, probably all of us, we thirst for a refreshment of our spirit. If that includes you, then let's work through these next fifteen weeks together and seek with faith and joy the refreshment that God so dearly desires for us.

If 'refreshment' is a return to 'freshness', then it seems right that the first step in this process should include the use of our memory. So here are three questions/actions for you:

- Can you think back to a time when your soul overflowed with the joy and love
 of God? Think for a moment to one of those mountaintop experiences in your
 life. Breathe it in and see if you can experience again in some small way what
 your heart felt at that moment.
- Take a moment and thank God for that experience and what it meant in your life. Praise him for coming to you in such an intimate and powerful way.
- Ask God to keep this memory fresh in your heart and to lead you to a time and place where you can experience such freshness again.

King David knew the importance of memory. When the ark was returned to the temple he responded with a Psalm of Thanksgiving where he called upon the children of Israel to "remember the wonders he has done, his miracles and judgments he pronounced." David returned to this theme in Psalm 103. Listen to his words and make them yours today.

"Praise the Lord. O my soul; all my inmost being praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits

Who <u>forgives</u> all your sins
And <u>heals</u> all your diseases
Who <u>redeems</u> your life from the pit
And <u>crowns</u> you with love and compassion
Who <u>satisfies</u> your desires with good things
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."

In Christ, you have been forgiven, healed, redeemed, crowned and satisfied! Let that reality wash over you today and refresh your spirit!

Prayer

Dear Lord,

I praise you for those times in my life when you have been so close to me that my spirit soared like the eagle's. Today I claim your promise that I have been forgiven, healed, redeemed, crowned and satisfied. Now I pray that you would refresh my spirit, restore my youth and equip me in a new and powerful way to undertake this vocation to which you have called me.

To you be the honor and praise and glory, in Jesus' name,

#2 Are you Convinced? The Refreshment of Certainty

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

(Romans 8:38)

Several years ago I was struggling through a difficult time in my life when I felt like I was going it alone. God seemed far away and my spiritual vitality was gone. I was tired, overwhelmed by life and stressed. I was thirsty for refreshment but I couldn't find it in church or work or vacations. I was nearly despondent when one day I came across this verse. It was a verse I had read so many times that I nearly had it memorized. But it had not made its way from my head to my heart. Suddenly, as clearly as if he were standing beside me, I heard God say to me, "Scott, you are not convinced." I realized that I had never absorbed the startling truth that God really loved me with an undying, unequivocal and totally underserved love.

It is one thing to know this in your head, it is quite another to let it overwhelm your heart. And I learned that I could do nothing in this world until I was able to know the certainty of God's love for me in any and every situation.

Refreshment begins with certainty. Just as uncertainty and doubt breed stagnation, fear and anxiety, real certainty based on God's love for us in Jesus Christ produces in us a spirit that is enlivened, freed and refreshed.

Are you convinced?

Prayer

Gracious Heavenly Father,

You are the lover of my soul, and I claim that love right now. I pray today for that certainty that is promised to me in Romans. I stand before all that threatens my joy and peace and I say to it, "You have no place in me, because I am convinced!" Help me Lord, in my darkest moments to speak these words, confident that in you they are true yesterday, today and forever. Amen.

#3 Singing a New Song: The Refreshment of Change

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? (Psalm 137: 1-4)

Let's face it, some people just don't like change. Even good, positive change can bring a certain amount of anxiety for many. Yet I have become convinced that God uses change to refresh our spirits. There is an insidious form of self-reliance that can come from the familiar and comfortable. When we are in our routines, when we have our patterns engrained and our life becomes predictable, it is easy to rely on ourselves and trust in our own efforts.

For some this happens when we have been in one job too long. We get staid and our work becomes unimaginative. For some this happens when our success breeds self-satisfaction. In whatever form, the lack of change in our lives can paralyze our spirit.

The children of Israel were in Babylon due to their disobedience. God brought sweeping change upon them and they found themselves captives in a foreign land. As they thought about their old life in Zion, they were unable to sing their songs of praise. Yet God would use their captivity to teach them to love and follow him, a lesson they never would have learned if they had been allowed to stay in Jerusalem amid their self-reliance and arrogance.

How is God using change in your life to refresh your spirit? Are you able to sing songs of praise even in a foreign land?

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,

I do not always understand the changes that you have brought into my life, but I know that you love me and want the very best for me. Help me today to see your hand at work in the changes that I am facing. Help me to trust in you more deeply and follow you more obediently because of this change. And Lord, put a new song in my heart, even in the midst of this foreign land.

In Jesus' name,

#4 Dialogue with God: The Refreshment of Prayer

Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer. (Psalm 66:20)

Consider these quotes:

"Prayer catapults us onto the frontier of the spiritual life...To Pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us." Richard Foster

"To have God near is to enter the holy of holies – to breathe the fragrance of the heavenly air, to walk in Eden's delightful gardens. Nothing but prayer can bring God and man into this happy communion." E.M. Bounds

Scripture and the saints of the church show us how important prayer is to the refreshment of our spirits. I need to let others speak here, because, quite frankly, I have never been great at cultivating a dynamic prayer life. Don't get me wrong, I love to pray and I feel God's presence in a wonderful way often when I commit time to meditation and prayer. I just don't do it often enough, and I don't know why.

The point is that God is always waiting, always there, always approachable and always ready to come near to those who want to be near to him. He waits today to refresh our spirits. He is there, right now, waiting to transform, to walk again with us in the garden and let us 'breathe the fragrance of heavenly air'.

Will you go to him today, right now, and let him refresh your spirit through the sweet communion of prayer?

Prayer

Dear Lord God,

Thank you for the incredible gift of prayer. Forgive me Lord for neglecting it, and by neglecting it, neglecting you. I know that you wait each morning and every minute of every day for me to come to you in prayer. You wait to hear, to bless, to comfort, to guide and to respond. Help me cultivate a passion to come to you in prayer.

And when I come, wash over me with your sweet presence, that my spirit may be refreshed.

In the name of our great Intercessor, Jesus Christ,

#5 He Restoreth My Soul: The Refreshment of Following

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
(Psalm 23: 1-4)

These famous words from the 23rd Psalm carry a challenge for us as success-driven, stressed out believers. The central idea in these first four verses is that of following. The word translated as 'makes' in Hebrew means 'encourage' or invite'. The same idea comes in the parallel verse where the Good Shepherd 'leads' us by the still waters, where our souls are restored, or we could say, refreshed. Reading on, it is the Good Shepherd who 'guides' us on the right paths, so that even when we walk into darkness, we find comfort in His abiding presence and protection.

The question for us today is, are we willing to be led?

Are we willing to follow?

There are still waters, green pastures, restoration, wide paths, righteousness and comfort where he wants to take us. Often we miss out on the refreshment that the caring Shepherd has for us because we are simply not willing to be led.

How is God trying to lead you today? Are you listening and watching with an open heart that is ready to follow wherever and whenever the Good Shepherd beckons?

Prayer

Gracious and Loving Father,

You so often call to me to follow you with faith, and I so often refuse. Forgive my lack of obedience, my desire to go my own way, my deaf ears and my stubborn will. I so deeply long for the green pastures and still waters that you have prepared

for me. I am in such need of your comfort. I ask today that you would grant me the courage and the faith to follow wherever you lead me and that you would continue to call. And I ask that as I obey, you would restore and refresh my soul.

In the name of the Good Shepherd,

#6 Being over Doing: The Refreshment of Space

So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 16:32-33)

God is infinitely more concerned with who you are than in what you do. Do you believe that? I have come to that conclusion through my own study of Scripture and theology. It is not that God does not care about our work for the kingdom, but he has been from the beginning and will continue to be until the end of days the 'lover of our soul.' He seeks hearts first, and then hands. He wants our love, our surrender to him, our total trust and our complete allegiance. These are matters that pertain to who we are. He seeks to shape our character, transform our nature and 'make all things new', including us.

Why then do we spend so much of our lives focusing on what we do. The eyes of God are searching to and fro across the earth for sets of eyes that are looking back for him. He is seeking men and women who want to be changed before they are charged. We are called first to be the people of God, and only secondly to do the work of God.

How much of your day today will be dedicated to opening yourself up so that God may shape your character, transform your heart and deepen your love for him? For every moment that you give over to that eternal work, your spirit will be refreshed. God is infinitely more concerned with who you are than in what you do.

Prayer

Gracious and Loving God,

Thank you for loving my soul. Help me today to give my heart and soul over to you to be shaped and conformed to the image of your Son. Help me to stop, to make time, to be patient and to expect your transforming work in my life. Help me Lord to

value a Christ-like character over a full schedule. Help me Lord to see life as you see it, and to set my priorities accordingly. Refresh my spirit, oh Lord, that I might more fully be the person of God you created me to be.

In the name of the great transformer, Jesus Christ,

#7 The Balanced Image: The Refreshment of Self-Awareness

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful,

I know that full well.

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body.

All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

(Psalm 139: 13-16)

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. (Romans 12:3)

These two Scriptures are examples of a tension that is found throughout the Bible regarding how we are to view ourselves as God's children. It points us to a balance that is critical for our wellbeing. We are to walk that line between arrogance on one hand and self-doubt on the other. In short, we are not to think too highly or too lowly of ourselves.

When we get out of balance, we lose our vitality and our spirit is repressed. Arrogance denies our trust in God and our understanding of his provision for everything. When we are arrogant, we are grieving the Holy Spirit and cutting ourselves off from the gentle leading of the Good Shepherd. When we go it alone, we do so with a dried up spirit.

When we give in to self-doubt and allow a negative self-image to develop in us, we deny the goodness of God's creation and we cut ourselves off from the refreshment that can only come through intimacy with our creator.

The enemy wants us to be out of balance, so he will work furiously to cultivate within us either spiritual pride or self-loathing. Have you gotten out of balance? Do you need to hear today that you are 'fearfully and wonderfully made'? Or the warning not to 'think of yourself more highly than you ought'? It is in maintaining the

balance between these two errors, and living confidently as God's beloved and forgiven child that we know the refreshment of the Spirit of God in our lives.

Prayer

Dear Loving Creator God,

You have made me in your image as your beloved, special child, and I claim that for myself today. You also know that I am a sinner, daily in need of your merciful grace and forgiveness. Without you I can do nothing. Help me, Lord, to live within this balance. And meet me there everyday with the refreshing presence of your Spirit.

In Christ's name I pray,

#8 The Tale of Two Treasures: The Refreshment of Release

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

(Matthew 13:44)

Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."
When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

(Matthew 19:21-22)

These two Scriptures paint very different pictures of how we respond to God's call to follow him. In the first, a man finds a treasure hidden in a field. The treasure is so great that he 'sells everything he has' to buy the field. This he does 'with great joy'. The second story tells us of a young man who came to Jesus to ask about inheriting eternal life. When Jesus tells him to 'sell everything he has' so that he might be free to follow Jesus, he leaves 'in great sadness'. The first man understands the value of the hidden treasure and knows that no price is too large to pay to secure it. The second man realizes the cost and leaves with the heavy burden of what he must give up if he is not to remain in bondage to his wealth.

Freedom and bondage, joy and sadness, eternal treasure and earthly wealth. Jesus reminds us that "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 6:21)

Where is your treasure today? Is your heart free, joyful and focused on eternal treasures? Or are you in bondage, sad and anxious about your earthly goods? Jesus promises supreme refreshment for the spirit that has been set free from bondage to our earthly treasures. Do you know the personal refreshment that comes from release? Have you been set free?

Prayer

Gracious Lord,

I sit here reading this and in my heart I admit that I am still in bondage to the things of this world. There are things that I want that I do not need, and I have anxiety about losing the things I have. I can, in my most honest moments, name the things around me that have a hold on me that bind me down and cause me stress. Merciful Father, I want this to be one of those honest moments. Search my heart and know my anxious thoughts. Help me name my chains, and then, beloved Savior, help me to break loose. I want to be free to serve you, to know your exceeding joy in my soul, to live an unburdened life that glorifies you. I want to be free, and only you can set me free. I pray for that work to begin in me today, right now.

In the name of the Great Liberator and Overcomer, Jesus Christ my Lord,

#9 Taking up the Towel: The Refreshment of Service

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 10:45)

There is a great Latin phrase that can help us understand the Refreshment of Service. It is *incurvatus en se*. It means 'to be curved in on one's self'. You can form the mental image for yourself. It is a silly posture when you think about it, but it is so easy to assume. When we focus our attention on our own needs, our own problems and our own situation in life, we become *incurvatus en se*. Even when we are working diligently for God's kingdom we can go for a long time failing to lift our eyes up beyond the horizon of our own busy world. The products of living *incurvatus en se* are exhaustion, anxiety, resentment and a dry spirit.

How do we get out of this posture? By serving others. The blessings of service are abundant and transformational. Serving others lifts our eyes to see our own life in greater perspective. In serving our neighbor we consider our neighbor's needs, which always makes us thankful for what we have. In serving we invest time in something of value beyond our own small world, which always bring greater value to the things in that world. Most importantly, serving 'uncurves' us. It opens us up toward others and re-forms us outwardly that God may do a great transformational work within us.

In these ways and more, service refreshes our spirit.

Do you want to have a reason to smile today? Find someone in real need and serve them. Does your countenance need lifted? Seek out a neighbor in need and meet that need for them. Do you want to be refreshed in spirit? Be a source of refreshment in the life of someone else.

Prayer

Blessed Lord,

I confess that I live too much of my life curved in on myself. Today I humbly submit to your reforming work in my life. Open me up toward others. Give me a servant's

heart and put my hands and feet into action on behalf of my neighbor. And please Lord, do it today. Help me not rest my head on my pillow this day until I have taken the opportunity to serve my neighbor. And in my serving, refresh my spirit for your work. Uncurve me, Lord that I may be a blessing to others, and through serving them that I would glorify you.

In Jesus' name,

#10 The Ruler of Your Heart: The Refreshment of Peace

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts... for you were called to peace." (Colossians 3:15)

There is something absolute about the idea of ruling. It is exclusive and uncompromising. A country has only one true ruler, and so does your heart. Right now, as you read this devotional, something or someone is ruling your heart. There are a lot of competitors for the job. Everyday the world in which we live happily offers a number of possible rulers. Our enemy gladly obliges and adds many of his own. Perhaps the most fearsome competitors are pride and fear. Pride seeks to put us on the throne of our hearts, displacing God with self-reliance. Fear displaces both God and us, and leaves us vulnerable to anything and everything that threatens us.

In Colossians, Paul reminds us that there is to be one ruler in the heart of a Christian, and that is Christ. The fruit of Christ's reign is peace. His peace does not and cannot exist side-by-side with competing rulers. It is exclusive and sovereign. Even more importantly, this peace is our inheritance. It is part of what is meant by the new creation. Therefore, this peace is not just one option we may choose, but we were called to peace. A heart that knows this peace every minute of every day is ours by birthright, as children of God and co-heirs with the Prince of Peace.

Are you experiencing the deep peace that flows from a heart where God alone reigns supreme? Or has pride or fear (or both) claimed that throne? Even momentarily? The Spirit of God seeks to refresh your spirit through the gift of peace, the peace that 'passeth all understanding'. A heart that is ruled by the peace of Christ yields a spirit that is refreshed, content and confident. To know that refreshment in your spirit today, be sure the right ruler reigns in your heart.

Prayer

Gracious God and King of the Universe,

I give you back my heart today, right now. I confess that at times I have invited other rulers onto its throne. Sometimes pride and sometimes fear have ruled in my heart, and as a result, my spirit has withered and dried. And so, I give you back my

heart today. I renounce any reign but your own. And by giving over my heart to you, I claim the peace that I was called and redeemed to have. Fill my heart, Lord Jesus, with your love and presence so that fear and pride are forever banished. And in doing so, refresh my spirit.

In the name of my King and my God, Jesus Christ my Lord,

#11 Always and In all Things: The Refreshment of Praise

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (Phil 4:4)

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1Th 5:16-18)

If there is one command in Scripture that seems significantly challenging at best, and downright impossible at worst, it is this command to 'rejoice always' and 'give thanks in all circumstances'. The terms 'always' and 'all' are unequivocal. I could buy into this command if it had just said 'most of the time' and 'often'. I believe I rejoice in God's goodness and love as a general rule. I am a generally thankful person who is known to repeat the phrase 'all good things come from God' with great frequency. So the 'most of the time' and 'often' translation would fit my overall approach to life quite well.

But what am I suppose to do with 'always' and 'in all circumstances'? For there are clearly times, usually daily, where I most certainly do not feel like rejoicing, and where the circumstances do not in any way call for a response of thankfulness. Are these verses then just examples of exuberant hyperbole which we can choose to set aside when the occasion does not fit the command, or do the writers really mean what they say?

I have found in my own life that there is inestimable power in praise, far beyond what I would have believed if I had not experienced it for myself. Praise is perhaps the greatest weapon we have against the enemy. Right when he is at the threshold of victory in our lives, brought about by some anxiety, crisis, or despairing attitude, we have the power to crush his schemes and declare our freedom and loyalty, all through the simplest act of praise to God.

Praise resets our priorities and allegiances. Genuinely praising God in the midst of life's greatest difficulties is like rebooting a computer that has frozen. It puts everything back in its proper place and lets us start afresh with the right perspective and the tools we need to meet every challenge.

Praise declares who our God is and where our trust lies. It is the proclamation of our worldview that is wholly centered on Christ. Praise and thanksgiving have this incredible power.

This week will you allow God to refresh your spirit by practicing an attitude of rejoicing and a spirit of constant praise in all things? If you do, I believe you will be overwhelmed by the results. The thankful heart is a heart set free, it is a heart transformed, and it is a heart refreshed.

Prayer

Gracious God,

I come to you today with a heart filled with gratitude and praise. I praise you not just for your acts and works of kindness, abundance and provision in my life, but I praise you for who you are. I thank you for the gift of your Son, that through him I might be your child. I thank you for loving me from the foundation of the world. I thank you for not giving up on me when you have had so many reasons so many times to do so. I thank and praise you for the love I know from you, and as a result, the love I have through family and friends around me. They are all reflections of you. Finally, I praise and thank you for the good work in me that you seek to do through the challenges and difficulties I am facing. I know that you are sovereign over all things, and that everything I am facing will ultimately be used for my good. Help me to trust in that promise, so that I might truly rejoice always and thank you in all circumstances. And as I learn to do so, refresh my spirit.

In your Son's precious name I pray,

#12 Measuring Enough: The Refreshment of Contentment

I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Phil 4:10-13)

How do you define what is enough for you? How much is enough money to make, to save and to spend? How do you define for yourself what is enough clothing, enough food, enough electronic gadgets, enough television channels and enough time to watch them, enough sporting events, enough shoes and enough popularity? How much is enough for you? That is an intensely personal question. No one can answer it for us, but we answer it daily by the choices we make.

The enemy is at work in our world determined to help us each answer that question in exactly the same way. Regardless of our income, our lifestyle, our investment portfolio or class, our enemy wants us to respond in unison with one voice and answer, "just a little more."

You can be a discontent millionaire and a discontent pauper. Discontentment knows no economic boundaries. The common denominator is a gnawing desire to have what is just out of reach or what someone else has, believing that it will finally make You truly happy.

Discontentment dries our spirit. It does so because, at its core, it is an indictment of God's gracious care and provision in our lives. It accuses God of holding back and holding out. It assumes that we deserve more, but somehow we are not receiving all we really need.

The Apostle Paul turns this idea on its head when he says that he has learned the secret of being content in any and every circumstance. Wealth and the accumulation of stuff are of no consequence. Contentment transcends what's in our bank accounts and storage units. For Paul, and for all of us who are in Christ, the secret is not a mind manipulation process or a new form of the power of

positive thinking. It is the truth of God's presence, provision and providence in our lives. It is a daily trust that God is always near us, will always 'supply all of our needs, according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus', and is sovereign over every circumstance in our lives.

Presence, provision and providence. Because of his certainty in them, Paul could write from the bowels of a dark prison with a spirit of contentment. In the midst of the most demanding of situations Paul knows this contentment, because, for him, Christ is enough.

Is Christ your full provision today? Can you rest in him, knowing that regardless of your situation, whether in plenty or in want, you are content in him? If you can know and claim that contentment for yourself, you will also know the refreshing release from the anxious striving for more and more. And your spirit will be refreshed.

Prayer

Gracious Lord,

My provider and constant companion, help me today to be released from the bondage of always wanting more. Forgive me of my lack of trust in you, and for seeking happiness in the accumulation of things or experiences, instead of seeking my only contentment in you. I give myself back to you today and ask that your presence, provision and providence will be the sole source of my daily contentment. I know you want the every best for me, and I trust you with my life. Refresh my spirit and give me a heart that is at rest and content in you alone.

I pray this in your almighty and gracious name,

#13 In His Time: The Refreshment of Patience

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law,

to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. (Gal 4:4-5)

There are a great number of verses in Scripture that speak of 'patience', 'waiting on the Lord' and 'in God's time'. I have chosen to reference only one. I did so because this one verse is both a wonderful Advent scripture, and so beautifully illustrates our main point.

The verse, however, forces a question. Why didn't God send his son when the Children of Israel were slaves for 400 years in Egypt? Or when they were captives in Babylon, or just before the Assyrians nearly wiped them from the face of the earth? For that matter, why didn't Jesus come to earth as the child of Adam and Eve, and save the world from so many millennia of suffering and pain and oppression and death? On the other hand, why didn't he wait until today, when the Internet and television could have helped him broadcast his message worldwide in minutes? Why not today when he could have been interviewed by CNN, had a book published and had his own blog? Why come to earth in a technologically barren time, in a backwater place like Palestine in a dreary era such as the first century Middle East?

This question parallels so many others in our lives that deal with our time-line and God's perfect timing. I don't know about you, but my own perception of what would be 'a good time for God to act' seldom coincides with his saving and transforming actions. I have wondered where God was at times, why his entrance into the scene seemed to require that we stand on the very brink of disaster. Yet as I look back on my life, he was always there. Disaster was averted, rescue came, strength was restored right when it was needed.

And so it was in the larger history of God's salvation of humanity and all creation. In the great sweep of this covenant history, God chose one precise historic moment, one exact geographical place, one very human woman and one decisive intervention into human affairs. We don't know why he chose this time or place or woman, but if we believe the Scriptures to be true (and we do!) then we also believe that this was the exact right and perfect time and place and woman.

"But when the time had fully come." That is the promise of Christmas, that on this day we celebrate the perfect moment in the entire history of the earth and, indeed the entire cosmos. This was the time for God's decisive act that would erase our sin, redeem us and bring us back into relationship with our Creator.

What is there in your life that requires you to wait patiently for 'the time to fully come?' Impatience will increase our anxiety, rob us of our joy and dry our soul. I pray that you will find rest and refuge as you consider Christ's humble birth and God's eternal faithfulness to us. Just as he came at exactly the right moment in human history, so he will come and act in your life at precisely the right moment. And that faith, that trusting posture, and that act of patience and confidence will refresh your spirit.

Prayer

Gracious Lord.

I have not always been patient as I waited for you to answer prayer, to intervene on my behalf, to heal or comfort or bring about justice. I confess that I have wondered at times if you would act at all. Forgive me for my impatience, my shortsightedness and my self-centeredness. Remind me again that you always come in the fullness of time. You are the Lord of time, and I will rest in that wonderful knowledge. Help me to be patient, to wait and hope and believe. And as I do, refresh my spirit.

In the name of the one who came in the fullness of time as my Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ I pray,

#14 All Things New: The Refreshment of Transformation

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Co 5:17)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope. (1 Pe 1:3)

There is an amazing moment in the movie The Passion of the Christ. To me, it makes the entire movie worth watching just for this one moment. While Jesus is carrying his cross down the Via Delorosa, his mother is being rushed through the back streets to position her to be able to come near to him one last time before Calvary. She finally sees her opening, and she runs to him as he falls to the ground under the cross's weight. She wipes the blood and sweat from his face, and as she does he has just one fleeting moment to speak to her. The words Mel Gibson chose to have him say still sends chills down my spine. He looks at her through his bruised and blood covered face and says to her, 'Behold, Mother, I am making all things new."

What a statement of God's work of transformation in the midst defeat. At what looked like the moment of Satan's greatest victory, at the height of Jesus' humiliation and suffering, he understood that it was in and through that suffering, and the death to come, that all things in heaven and on earth would be transformed.

This theme of victorious transformation through humiliation was started in the humble and inauspicious way that the Son of God came first to earth. When we celebrate Christmas and consider the humble and scandalous birth of the King of Kings it should remind us of God's plan of bringing triumph out of the lowliest and most difficult situations in life.

Over the past fifteen weeks I have been writing these devotions in the hope and prayer that they would be a source of refreshment for your spirit. I have covered the themes of memory, certainty, change, prayer, following, space, self-awareness, release, service, peace, praise, hope, contentment, and patience. I believe that all of these themes are ultimately wrapped up in the transforming work of the Spirit within us.

God wants to transform you, today. That is the bottom line of the Christian life. No matter how spiritually mature you may be, no matter how badly you may have fallen, how far you may feel from God, or how strong your relationship with him may feel to you today, you are called to take the next deeper step in your journey with God in Christ. Every day you and I decide if we will go that next step and be more fully conformed to his image, or if we will choose to go our own way, depend a little bit more on ourselves and be more conformed to the image of this world. There is no neutral decision. We either choose for Christ or for ourselves. Someone today will prove to be the lord of your life, and mine.

God stands ready to refresh our spirits every day. He inaugurated this transformation for us in Bethlehem, he won it for us on Calvary and he extends it to us every morning through his Spirit. I pray that these past fifteen weeks have been for you a season of refreshment. Let him continue to restore your soul as you choose daily the closer walk to which he calls you.

Prayer

Gracious and Merciful God.

I do so want to walk with you in a closer way on my life's journey. I seek with my whole heart your transforming work in my life. Take me back to the cross and empty tomb and help me understand again what was won for me there. Let me hear your voice and come to you wherever you call me. My hope and salvation are in you. I give myself back to you today and everyday that you might refresh my spirit.

In the name of the Babe of Bethlehem, the Lamb that was slain for me, and my resurrected and returning Savior, Jesus Christ, my Lord,

By: R. Scott Rodin

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