



God & the Dark Side of Life

The Psalms, which appear in the Old Testament as poetry, have served to nourish and strengthen God's people through the ages, both Jew and Christian. Whoever seeks to maintain a close spiritual relationship with God will find the Psalms power packed. This poetry is rich in presenting the benefits of depending upon God for all things in life. "You make me to lie down in green pastures and lead me beside still waters". (Ps.23) The Psalms affirm that God is close to His people and cares about their needs.

But what about the pot holes in life? What of those dark times when nothing seems to work out and all is lost? Life collapses, illness occurs, loved ones die, jobs are lost, homes go into foreclosure, marriages disintegrate, and depression dominates. Where is God in all of this? This is very personal for me and has brought me to where I am spiritually today.

What do the psalmists have to say about troubles and trials in life? A great deal! While the psalmists praise and

exalt God, they also lament at great length. "I am poured out like water and all my bones are out of joint. My tongue sticks to my jaws and you lay me in the dust of death". (Ps. 22) God allows bad things to happen to good people. (Job) "You prepare a meal for me in the presence of my enemies". (Ps.23)

Walter Brueggemann, an outstanding contemporary theologian, has recently written an insightful book: *The Spirituality of the Psalms*. In it he makes a legitimate case for this dark side of life being a natural part of God's activity. These chaotic and painful experiences in life serve to teach us that we are not in control of even our own lives, however difficult that reality is for us to accept. This matter of control is one of the most profound tenets of spirituality. *Let go and let God*.

As we move through these valleys of deep dark shadows with their threats to our well-being and even our lives, we are not foundering. We are headed somewhere. There is a destination. Furthermore, we are promised God's continued support. "If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there." (Ps.139). "Although I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you are there". (Ps.23)

Even that is not the end. The ending is always a wonderful and incredible surprise. C. S. Lewis gives it the title: *Surprised by Joy*. We come out of this spiritual turbulence and tribulation with a radically new perspective of God and life. We are transformed. New creatures. It is a difficult lesson to learn, but darkness is the very stuff of a new day. We seldom grow without pain. We go through a crucifixion of sorts and then experience a resurrection. Then every day becomes an Easter, although the shadow of Good Friday tags along.

Read the Psalms using the above thoughts as a template, and you will find yourself in them. Furthermore, you will



discover in a new and exciting way that God takes you quite seriously and is closer to you than the very breath you breathe.