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**Sunday 28 June to Sunday 5 July**

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Sunday 28 June 2020

# Choose life

by Ruth Olsen

**'If you make the Lord your refuge, and if you make the Most High your shelter ...' (Psalm 91:9).**

Read Psalm 91:9–16

Do you remember hearing, in your childhood, a parent or teacher say to you, 'If you do … then …', followed by a warning or promise? Does it surprise you that our Abba Father sometimes says that also – that some things are conditional? He is looking for a response, asking whether you are going to ‘step up’ in exercising responsibility, taking initiative, making your choice, and trusting him.

The Lord has designed and created us to be in relationship, with him and with other people. That involves rights, responsibilities, privileges, and opportunities. And he desires that we choose life, not death (see Deuteronomy 30:11–20). Jesus has made this possible for us, having fulfilled God’s requirements for us (see Romans 10:1–13). In all these things, the Holy Spirit is our Helper who enables us to consider and then take God at his word, to trust Jesus who both reveals Abba Father to us and sends the Holy Spirit to work faith and empower us (see John 14:15–21,23–27).

Psalm 91:1 declares that those who live or dwell in the shelter of the Most High will find rest … That’s God’s promise to you. Here in verse nine, we are reminded that we have the option to choose. And that’s not just once – it's moment-by-moment.

***Lord, thank you that you are my refuge and shelter! Amen.***

Monday 29 June 2020

# Peace of mind and heart

by Ruth Olsen

**'No evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your home' (Psalm 91:10).**

Read Psalm 91:9–16

As we re-read this whole psalm, we are reminded of the promise of shelter and rest for those who live or dwell in trusting the Lord (verse one), to which we can intentionally say ‘yes, I trust you Lord’ (verse nine). This needs to be our way of life. If we do, or as some translations say, because we do, then when anything comes against us, we will instinctively shelter ‘under his feathers and wings’ (verse four), because that is what we have made a habit of doing.  And from that place of ‘seeing life through his feathers’, we receive a different perspective. Instead of fear, we can rest in trusting the One who is the Overcomer of any evil or plague.

COVID-19 has been described as a plague. Physical distancing and self-isolating are part of the Lord’s protection for us. And although such measures are probably not our preference, they are a wise strategy for decreasing the spread of this unseen invader. That’s all part of living from the place of peace that Jesus gives. Listen to him: 'I am leaving you with a gift – peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid' (John 14:27 NLT).

**Lord Jesus, refresh us in your peace of heart and mind. Thank you! Amen.**

Tuesday 30 June 2020

# Angels part 1

by Ruth Olsen

**‘For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go’ (Psalm 91:11).**

Read Psalm 91:9–16

To which of the angels did God ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet' (from Psalm 110:1)? Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation (see Hebrews 1:1–14 NIV)?

Revelation 12:9 tells us that Satan, the one deceiving the whole world, was thrown down to the earth with all his angels. They work against people, to entrap people in captivity. But yes, God’s beloved Son Jesus now reigns, superior to all angels; and God’s angels minister as those sent to serve people. He gives them their instructions – we don’t – although we can ask him to send his angels to anyone in need.

Satan quoted from Psalm 91:11–12 when tempting Jesus at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry (see Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13). Satan knew the word of God, but Jesus did too and replied 'It is also written [in Deuteronomy 6:16]: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test"'. At the end of those temptations, the devil left, and angels came and attended Jesus (Matthew 4:11; see also Matthew 26:53 and Luke 22:43).

We need to get to know God’s word to apply it, also to help us discern when Satan uses it with a twist against us, as he did with Jesus.

**Lord, thank you that you send your angels to help people in need. Amen.**

Wednesday 1 July 2020

# Angels part 2

by Ruth Olsen

**‘He will command his angels concerning you’ (Psalm 91:11–12).**

Read Psalm 91:9–16

There are lots of times in the Old Testament where angels were sent to minister to, encourage, protect, rescue, help or strengthen someone. Likewise, in the New Testament, they are often sent by God as a messenger. We may not realise it at the time when they help us, only later, when we reflect on that near-miss, or that one who helped us when we were in desperate need but then was gone when we turned to thank them.

As we saw yesterday, God sends his angels to minister to people and to serve them. Yes, even today! They will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone (verse 12). That sounds very practical, even in everyday situations. The Lord knows our smallest need, as well as our biggest need. That doesn’t mean we won’t ever be hurt. Rather, in any situation of danger, trouble, or need, we can ask the Lord to send his angels to help us.

Martin Luther ends his morning and evening prayer with: '… let your holy angels be with us, that the wicked foe may have no power over us'. We are blessed with the Holy Spirit living in us, changing us from within, growing us in Jesus. And we are blessed when God sends his angels to help us.

**Father, thank you for all that your angels do! Amen.**

Thursday 2 July 2020

# Stand firm then …

by Ruth Olsen

**‘You will trample upon lions and cobras; you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet!’ (Psalm 91:13).**

Read Psalm 91:9–16

In a footnote to this verse, my NIV Study Bible says, 'These double references to lions and poisonous snakes balance the double references of vv5–6, and complete the illustrative roster of mortal threats'.

We cannot deal with and overcome any terrifying threat ourselves, but only by the power of the Holy Spirit (see Zechariah 4:6). He works in us and through us as we dwell in the Lord’s shelter. Yes, we need to acknowledge our fears, yet, we need to remember that God provides for us in this also.

These ‘mortal threats’ can also refer to when Satan comes against us. If we take God at his word, then Satan will oppose us! But the Apostle Paul wrote, 'Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood [people] … Stand firm then ...' (see Ephesians 6:10–20). Wearing the different parts of the armour that God provides for us is simply to 'put on' Jesus; he is our covering! He is our truth, righteousness, peace, shield of faith, etc. And we ‘overcome’ Satan by what we say about Jesus and his blood shed for us – our covering won for us at the cross! (see Revelation 12:7–11).

**Holy Spirit, teach us to ‘stand’, and to ‘stand firm’**. **Amen.**

Friday 3 July 2020

# With his love

by Ruth Olsen

**‘The Lord says, “I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name”’ (Psalm 91:14).**

Read Psalm 91:9–16

Yesterday’s verse was a bit heavy and scary, but here we’re reminded who our refuge is! Loving the Lord and trusting in his name implies a relationship that has grown in responding to him and his life-changing word. Jesus spoke of this intimate relationship: 'My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me' (John 10:27 NIV). The more we dwell in trusting him and his word, moment by moment, the more we will come to know him and his faithfulness. We will learn to recognise his Spirit’s quiet inner voice of warning, pause, change of direction or move. We will learn to be still and let the Lord be God in our situation.

What does it mean to love the Lord? 'We love because he first loved us, poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit' (1 John 4:19; Romans 5:5). It’s not primarily feelings but action for the blessing of the other. Included are menial things like doing the dishes or washing dirty feet (see John 13:1–17). 'As I have loved you, so you must love one another' (John 13:34,35). We love the Lord by loving with his love! Our security comes from him. By soaking in Jesus’ love, given to us freely by God, we can love even when it is difficult.

**Lord, thank you that your love will bring us through any situation. Amen.**

Saturday 4 July 2020

# Promise after promise

by Ruth Olsen

**‘When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honour them. I will reward them with a long life and give them my salvation’ (Psalm 91:15–16).**

Read Psalm 91:9–16

Wow. Promise after promise, repeated for emphasis, piled up and flowing over! That demonstrates the nature of the Lord our God! It delights our Heavenly Father’s heart when his children take him at his word and trust him. As Paul says, ‘God’s purpose was for the nations to seek after him and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him – though he is not far from any one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:27–28 NLT). We can hear his heart of love for people – a father longing for his people to trust him.

This psalm gives overflowing testimony to the security the Lord gives to those who trust him, available to all. Taking time to dwell in his word lets it seep into our inner being, calming our fears and reassuring us when needed. Threats, discomforts and inconvenience will happen in life. But we are never abandoned!  The One who has called us his children is at work every day. I have learned that he has gems and treasures hidden in the hard places, waiting for us to discover. Looking for him there can even turn it into an adventure.

**Lord, you are good, and your steadfast love endures forever! Amen.**

Sunday 5 July

# Negativity and positivity bias

by Jane Mueller

**'Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope' (Romans 5:3,4).**

Read Romans 5:1–5

From minor annoyances to major disasters, our bias towards a specific episode of suffering can change over time.

Psychology research shows that, in our human condition, our short-term attention is biased towards negativity while our long-term attention is biased towards positivity. Typically, we tend to reflect on past episodes positively regardless of how we felt at the time. This is, at times, attributed to how reflection exposes the benefits and growth that evolves through suffering. When we are in the moment, in our brain’s effort to protect us from imminent harm, our negativity bias tends to kick in, warping our vision of long-term positive outcomes.

God gets our attention through suffering as we are reminded of our dependence on him. Suffering stimulates our thirst for him; it is an invitation to draw near to him. And his response reveals his sovereignty. When suffering strikes and adversity sets in, an earnest heart of thankfulness and trust reminds us that the joy of the Lord is our strength.

There is no need to run and hide from suffering, and there is no need to allow our negativity bias to kick in, because God brings good out of all things. We know that suffering produces: it accomplishes, it generates, it engineers endurance, character and hope. And with hope, we’re never left short-changed.

***Lord God Almighty, I accept all my sufferings in your name, and I offer them to you to use for your purposes. Teach me to rejoice in these times, knowing they are a means of producing hope and drawing closer to you. Amen.***