

One day I came home to find a strange black spot on the driveway and a funny smell in the air. Searching a little further I found a sneaker that had been half burned up. Alarmed, I began interrogating my sons. I found out one of my boys had burned the sneaker. So I'm thinking it's time to call a psychologist; I have a troubled child here, and so I am distressed! I think of all the things that might have driven this child over the edge, when his older brother comes to me and says, "Mom, calm down! He's making a statement. He hates Nike! He burned the Nike sneaker because it's his stand on Nike. He's an Adidas man." And my son was right. His brother's burned sneaker went to the top of his bookcase as a teenager's statement – a symbol representing what he stood for. He hates Nike.

Psalms 91 is God's statement. God takes a stand. Many people wonder what kind of God our God is. We wonder, is God here? How is God here for me? Is God here in power? Most people want to know that. In fact, books are written about the power of God in the world. Remember a book called When Bad Things Happen to Good People by Harold Kushner?

Then there's Christine Daniel's book, If There is a God, Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People? and Melvin Tinker's book, Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People, with the subtitle or, Why Do Good Things Happen to Bad People? He kind of covers all the bases about dealing with the Job-like problems of life. Finally one author, Andrew Murray, wrote simply: The Problem of God. That kind of sums up our human conclusion doesn't it? Well, God has much to say and Psalm 91 is God's statement about how He is here, so let's explore it.

The Psalms are open dialogue between God and humans; conversations; prayers. Through them we learn that God is a God who is near, who listens, and who speaks. It is a dynamic and involved relationship in which both parties participate. The book of Hebrews says the Psalms are the very words of God and are therefore prophetic. They proclaim a message from God. Psalm 91 is a message of trust and confidence in a God who goes to great lengths to protect his children. It is God's statement of what it means to believe. God tells us from God's perspective the benefits of belonging to God, of loving God, and of abiding in him.

It helps us hear it if we make a list. Here's what God says: "I will

- *deliver you* from snares and terrible things;
- *cover you* with my pinions;
- *put you under my wings*;
- *faithfully be your shield and buckler* (which is a protective wall)
- *shield you* from the terror and pestilence at night, and
 - Do you ever lie awake at night? As a child I would wake up afraid and go every night and get into bed with my mother.
- *save you* from the arrow and destruction that comes in the day."
 - We often receive bad news in the day. I worked in the Executive Office at Southwest Airlines on 9/11/2001 and of course witnessed that awful

destruction. We get other bad news during the day, such as a call from a doctor informing us of illnesses.

This list is a declaration of love. But that's not all. God continues, "I will

- *protect you;*
- *hear you and answer when you call;*
- *be with you in trouble;*
- *rescue you;*
- *honor you.*

It sounds almost like wedding vows, doesn't it? Or, what a new father might say upon the birth of his child.

And there's more! God adds:

- *punishment will not come near you,* even though it will touch thousands of others; no, they will fall by your side; but you will only look and see the punishment of the wicked! (I wonder if that's about the end times?)
- *no evil will befall you;*
- *nor scourge come near your tent."*
- *God will guard you in all your ways.* It begins now.

This Psalm gives a view of God as very possessive of those who believe. "You will not be afraid when bad things come your way because you have me. I am with you and watch over you simply because you love me. What more could we want?

So why, children, all the anxiety?

We are like the disciples. Remember when they were in the boat that night with Jesus sleeping in the stern and a storm came up? They were sure they were going to die. But Jesus wasn't anxious at all. He said, *Where's your faith?* (Lk 8:23-25) Remember when they had a very hungry crowd of 5,000 and Jesus said to his disciples "You feed them," and they said, *Who, us? We can't do that! That would cost a fortune!* (Jn 6:1-13) But Jesus provided and they indeed fed them. Another time Jesus said, "Don't fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell" (Mt 10:28).

Anxiety. We all have it. But Jesus didn't have it. And people came to Jesus with terribly pressing problems, like their children dying. Once Jesus went to the home of such a man whose daughter had already died and before he healed her he said to them, *"Don't worry, she's just asleep. Just have faith."* (Mk 5:35-43) And they laughed at him, "Are you kidding?" they said, and it was so hard for them. That's kind of where we are too.

Anxiety makes a statement. Many Christians have anxiety but it does not need to be that way. This Scripture is God's statement. It addresses our anxiety. It's just like my son's sneaker statement which spoke to all teenage boys who entered his room. Psalm 91 stands as a beacon before us, crying out loudly, *no anxiety necessary for the child of God!* It's a statement to all Christians. Do you want things to be different? Are you

ready to be moved from anxiety to joy? Let me tell you some stories of some people who decided to trust this Psalm:

1. During World War I, the 91st Infantry Brigade of the British Army was preparing to enter combat in Europe. Their commander was a devout Christian and he gave his men a little card on which was printed the 91st Psalm, the same number as their brigade. They agreed to recite that Psalm daily. During their turn, the 91st Brigade was engaged in three of the bloodiest battles of World War I – Chateau Thierry, Belle Wood and the Argonne. The 91st Brigade did not suffer a single combat-related casualty.
2. Actor Jimmy Stewart also took this Psalm to heart. Stewart enlisted in the Army Air Corps during WWII. His father gave him a copy of the 91st Psalm with a goodbye note saying, “The thing that takes the place of fear and worry is the promise of these words . . . I feel sure that God will lead you through this.” Jimmy Stewart returned home a decorated war hero, unharmed, even though his record included twenty combat missions. During the height of the battle, Stewart said he learned to lean on the words of his tattered copy of Psalm 91.
3. There is a group of Houston Marine moms who since 2005 have been sending 91st Psalm bandanas to soldiers in battle. A mom of a soldier bought 150 bandanas for the 15th Transportation Unit at Ft. Sill and asked them to pray every day before their mission. These bandanas mean a lot to the soldiers. Once a marine left his bandana behind, and the whole squad did a Search and Rescue and went back and got it. Another mother said, “It’s just a piece of cloth--but I carried my 91st Psalm bandana with me everywhere. When I felt panicked I would pull out the bandana. This piece of cloth reminds me of God’s promise of protection and love. The key is regular prayer of this Psalm.” One year later, all 150 soldiers returned home; not one was killed. The Houston Marine moms have sent over 5,000 91st Psalm bandanas to Iraq.¹

Perhaps someone here should make some Psalm 91 bandanas for us to wear. Or some cards for us to carry with Psalm 91 printed on it. Maybe we’ll become known as the Psalm 91 church.

But God’s statement is not for everyone. It’s not magic, even though it offers unqualified divine protection. Nor are we to interpret it as a formula that takes away all trouble. When you’re young you don’t expect trouble, but as we grow older, we become aware of the hidden traps and deadly hazards. We know mayhem is in many places and at times the world seems to run amuck. We know that sometimes people die and it seems so unfair. We live if not on, then very near the battlefield. Adults understand such is life.

And so, after considering all these things, I had an argument with God. I said to God, “How can you make such a blanket statement?”

¹www.houstonmarinemoms.org/bandana.asp , accessed 5/20/08.

God answered me and replied, *“Well, this Psalm is not for every believer! It’s only for those who want to move from anxiety to joy. Listen to the core truth: It’s only for those who want to live in my shelter and learn to abide in my shadow. It’s for those who say of me, God is their refuge. So it’s not for everyone. Not all my children live connected. But those who catch the vision of my care can live there.”*

I thought about that for awhile. I thought about dwelling – or staying with God, habitually residing, rather than running to God here and there when I need him; enjoying God’s presence sometimes but standing relatively far off, thinking of God in the distance or just as an occasional fleeting thought. When we live disconnected it’s hard to see God as good.

One of our sons has a little one-year-old. She ventures away but then she comes right back. If he leaves the room she looks for him and if he goes very far, she cries. To her, he is everything. She calls for his attention all the time and he dotes on her all the time. He does! He delights in her at all times and talks about her constantly.

God dotes on you. Do you bask in his attention? Do you seek it out? Do you seek refuge in his care? Or do you act more like a teenager and live far from him; giving him little time; and falling into those hidden traps of discouragement and fear, living on the battlefield alone? Your faith will be small if you live disconnected.

I lead a Bible study/prayer group at my house each week and one of the members missed four weeks. She came in last week and said, “Hi, my name is Sue. I have no excuse for not being here!” Do you hang out with God so seldom that you might have to reintroduce yourself to God in the same way?

Jesus describes it like this as he wept over Jerusalem: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Lk 13:34)

God said, *“Not all my children live near me. But those who catch the vision of my care can live there. And for those who do, I will deliver them from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; I will cover them with my pinions, and under my wings they will find refuge.”*

So what statement does your life make? What is your statement about what it means to be a believer? Are you willing to pull close to God’s side, to be gathered under God’s wings? Do you want to have great faith? Or, do you want to go out on the battlefield alone, wondering why bad things happen to good people and wondering if there is a God?

What is your statement to your friends and family?

God has made his statement. It’s a beacon of special delivery available to those who want to move from anxiety to joy. Is that you? It’s up to you. It’s your move.