

Through all the changing scenes of life,
in trouble and in joy,
the praises of my God shall still
my heart and tongue employ.

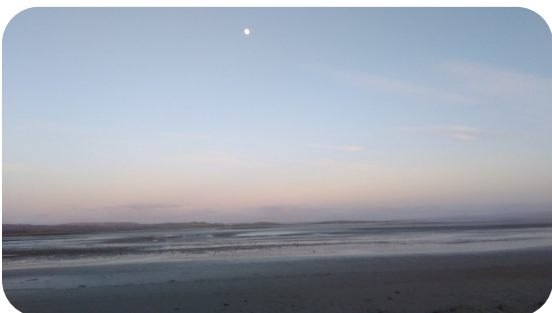
Oh, magnify the Lord with me;
with me exalt his name;
when in distress to him I called,
he to my rescue came.

The hosts of God encamp around
the dwellings of the just;
deliverance he affords to all
who on his succour trust.

Fear him, ye saints, and you will then
have nothing else to fear;
make you his service your delight,
your wants shall be his care.

Is God is a safe place to be?

It often amazes me how the same landscape
can look so different on any given day. I like
to walk down on the beach with the dog
when I can and I often wish that I was able to
paint and capture the different colours, sometimes dark and foreboding, other times beautiful
pastels, pinks, purples and blues. The beautiful mountains, sometimes snow-capped,



sometimes snagged in mist. The photographs I take just
don't capture it. Last year, I took some footage of two
extra high Spring tides coming into the bay, a couple of
months apart, one serene and gentle, the other surging
and wild. It reminds me of the constantly changing
scenes of our lives, sometimes filled with trouble,
sometimes filled with joy. I invite you to join me in
worshipping God together as we remind ourselves that in times of trouble or joy, he is
worthy of praise. (See words above)



Happy Birthday to Linda
(2nd Feb)



God Bless You!

Father God, thank you that you
understand the changing scenes of life,
and that you have compassion toward
us. We bring you our worship today,
because through Jesus you lead us into
your perfect love, which satisfies our
deepest longings, and opens the way to
abundant, everlasting life!
Thank you Jesus. **Amen.**

During this pandemic, we can often find ourselves feeling fearful and constantly wondering about our safety in ways we never previously imagined. Will I be safe if I go to the shop to buy food? Will I be safe if I touch my post? Am I safe in my own home, when someone in the household has to go to work?

Maybe during lock down, we have had more opportunity to focus on our faith in God and the relationship we have with him; we have wondered, 'Will my faith keep me safe? Is God a safe place? **Let's reflect on Psalm 91**

1 Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

2 I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

3 Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence.

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.

7 A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.

8 You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.

9 If you say, "The LORD is my refuge," and you make the Most High your dwelling,

10 no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent.

11 For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;

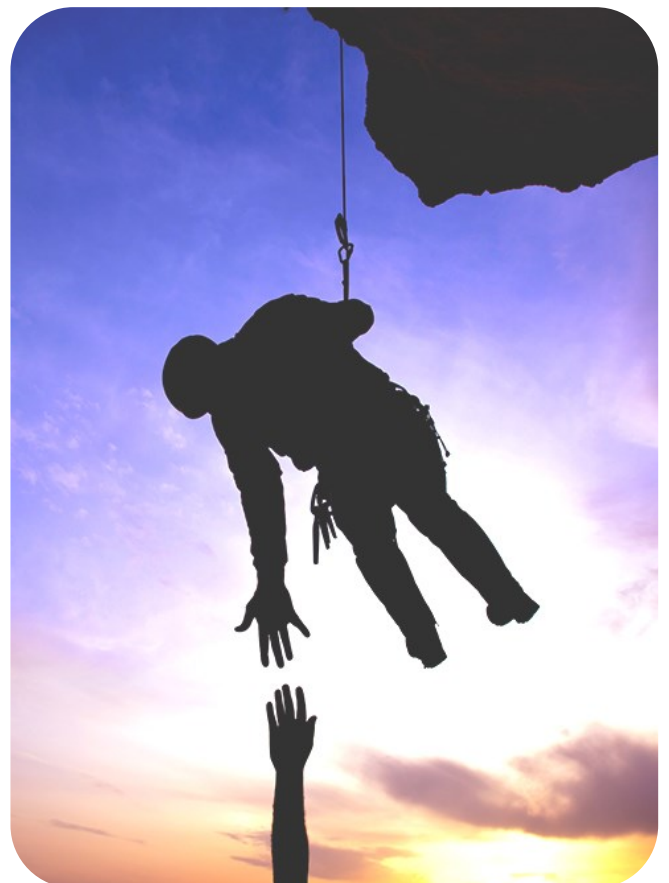
12 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

13 You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

14 "Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.

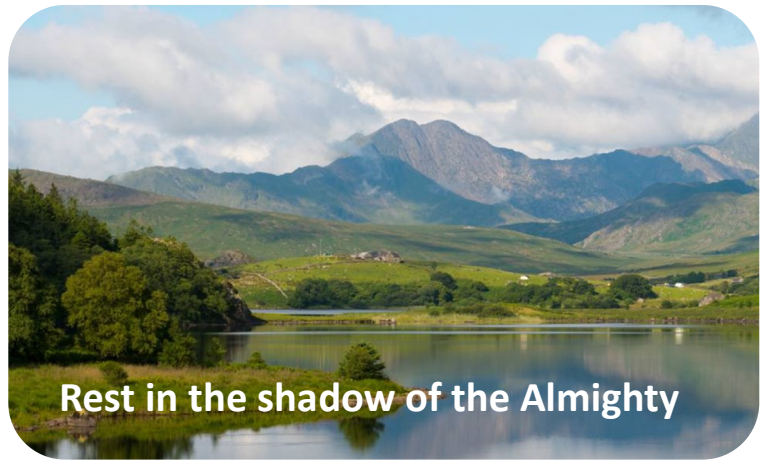
15 He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him.

16 With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."



Dwelling in God's Name

What name do you use when you address God? I love the fact that Jesus teaches us to call him 'Father'. Here in the opening verses of Psalm 91, we see 4 of God's names - there are over 100 names used for God in The Bible, not just for the sake of using random names, but because each name reflects something of his character and helps us to lean more fully into who God is.



We have when translated from their original.....

- ♦ **The Most High** The strongest of the strong, surpassing all others, supreme, above all power and authority
- ♦ **Almighty** All powerful, omnipotent. The Almighty can do all he has promised, no man or other power can thwart his ways.
- ♦ **Lord** I am who I am or I will be who I will be. Recently, we thought of him as Emmanuel, God with us.
- ♦ **God** The maker of the universe, the supreme creator of all life, creating from nothing the heavens and the earth and all that is in them.

What an incredible picture of the character of God we can build from just 4 of his names! Verse 1 tells us to dwell in God's name and character, not just to visit occasionally, but to actually take up residence and lean our full weight on the protection afforded to those who trust in his name. Here are some great one liners that we can speak out - before we even get out of bed in the morning - as we establish ourselves in the protection of God's names and all that they mean.

I live under the protection of the Most High

I dwell in the shadow of Almighty

The Lord is my refuge and my fortress/strength

I trust in the God who created all things



Just in the first 4 verses we have powerful images of God's protection for us to plant deep in our minds and hearts his shelter, a refuge, a fortress, his wings, a shield, a rampart, which brings to mind a defensive wall with a walkway on the top on which God stands to keep watch. Six images all evoking a sense of protection and safety.

Sheltering under his tenderness

This Psalm takes place during a time of God's judgement. The writer is again using metaphor to describe two threats which the enemies of God are facing at that time. The Psalm is clear in verse 7 & 8 that these threats are the punishment of the wicked, but those belonging to God have refuge in him. ***'He will see and observe the punishment of God on the wicked all around him, in their tens of thousands even, yet no harm will come near you.'*** The first threat described here is that of outside attack using the picture of a fowlers snare. (A fowler is someone who sets a trap that you don't see until it's too late, used here as a picture of hidden danger,) and also the picture of arrows flying, suggesting the attack of a foreign army. The second threat described is the terror of disease, epidemics, pestilence and plague. We see throughout The Bible that evil and harm are able to be directed as recompense on the wicked, but in such cases those dwelling in God's name can be sure of God's protection. Remember the plagues that fell on Egypt, but those sheltering under the blood marking the doorpost and the lintel were kept safe and the destroying angel passed over that house. (You can read about that in Exodus chapters 7 through to 12.)



In verse 4, we get this beautiful image of the tenderness of God in his faithful protection of his people. ***He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge.*** We find the same picture in ***Psalm 57*** when David is describing similar threats he was facing when he was on the run from Saul. He describes the fowlers snare as a net being spread for his feet, and of those who are hotly pursuing him, he uses the description of lions, ravenous beasts whose teeth are spears and arrows and tongues are sharp swords. In that circumstance, he pens these words ***'In you (God) my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed.'***

What an incredible place to be. Sheltering in the tenderness of God. The poetic imagery of being sheltered under wings when all around is threatening and scary, is so beautiful, so comforting and so safe. It's where The Most High, Almighty, Lord, God longs for his people to be. Sheltering under his tender protection. We see that same yearning in the heart of God in ***Matthew 23 v 27***, as Jesus speaks about Jerusalem and her refusal to acknowledge the Kingdom of God come to them through their Messiah ... ***'how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.'***

Resting in God's Strength

We've gone from dwelling to sheltering to resting which is I think a natural progression. If we have taken up permanent residence in a place of safety, then that is the place where we will confidently shelter, and so find ourselves in a place of peace and rest, without fear. The closing verse of our opening hymn said....'***Fear him ye saints and you will have nothing else to fear, then make you his service your delight, he'll make your wants his care***'.



In other words, we can step out confidently, trusting in the awesome, tender, strong protection of God to fulfil his purposes in and through our lives, whatever might be going on in the world around us. He is sovereign over the whole universe and he is sovereign over the smallest details of your life. In verses 11 & 12, we see the strength of God delegated out to angels to guard the one who trusts in God, lifting us up when the path is dangerous, (our first hymn talked about that also.)

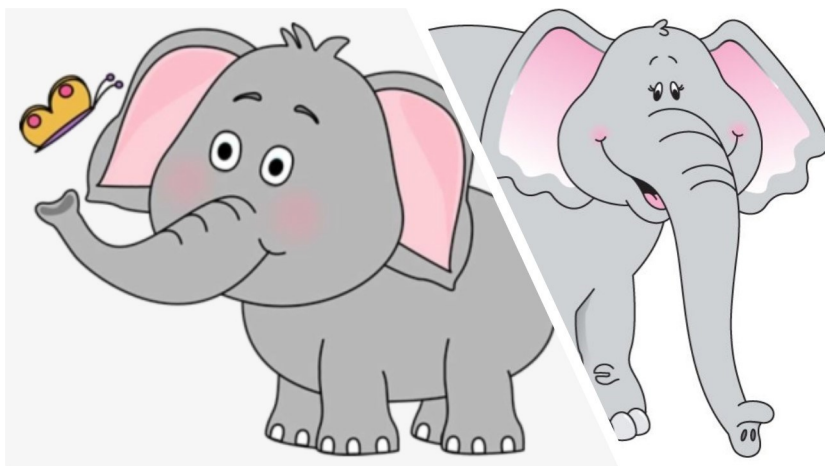
This musical poem of trust and confidence concludes with a proclamation of God's strength through a set of blessings on the person who loves him, acknowledges his name, and calls upon him. ***Verse 14 - 16. I will rescue him, protect him, answer him, be with him in trouble, deliver him, honour him, satisfy him with long life and show him my salvation.***

Let's examine our hearts and ask ourselves, Am I that person who loves and acknowledges God and calls upon him?

As we finish, we need to address two questions, the elephants in the room that are invariably awkwardly present whenever this Psalm is read.

If I put my trust in God, am I guaranteed to be safe from harm, from the corona virus?

If I do experience hardship and suffering, am I being judged by God?



We don't need to look very far, even within our own experiences of life to know that God's people don't seem to be exempt from suffering and pain. **Is this Psalm setting us up to be dis-appointed, or is there a much bigger, beautiful picture to get a hold of?**

The reason we can be so confident is that God's protection is not limited to our time in this world as it is, whether that be 9 days or 90 years. These days or years are just the tiniest part of our existence, the prologue to the main story. There's a much bigger narrative, because of the enormity of the resurrection. Through his resurrection from the dead, Jesus now meets us, bringing the glorious future into the now and says...

'I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me will live, even though he dies.'

Through the mighty strength of God who raised Jesus from the dead, we too are now people whose lives now intersect across two realities. We find ourselves in two places at once, two co-existing dimensions, one is a temporary, horizontal reality which is contained within the limitations of our physical body, and one is a vertical, permanent reality in which we are with Christ in heavenly dimensions. A reality which is all around us, but beyond our ability to tune into as yet, although as we experience the work of The Holy Spirit in our lives, we do sometimes tap in to little experiences within that frequency, little foretastes of what's to come!

The incredible reality is that we are now sealed with the promise of resurrection. Job looked ahead to this ... ***'though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God'***.

1 Corinthians tells us ***This body although sown in corruption will be raised incorruptible, sown in dishonour, raised in glory, sown in weakness, raised in power. Death has been swallowed up in victory.*** It has no claim on us!

This is the bigger picture; it makes my spine tingle and so excites me. It makes sense of my life, assuring me that I am safe in whichever dimension I exist and that everything I do 'in Christ' has meaning and far from being in vain is planted in the future re-creation and renewal of all things, as the fall is reversed and heaven and earth are once again united.

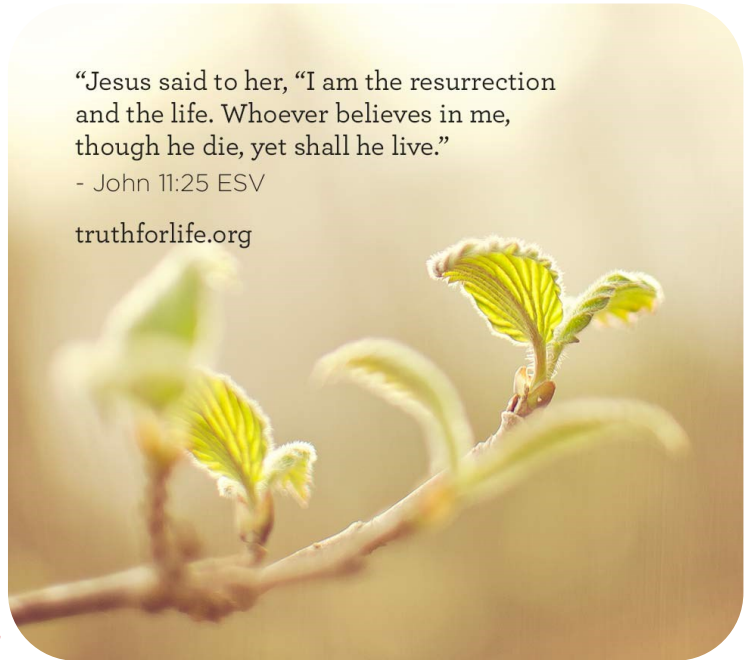
So back to our question? What about difficult circumstances and hard times, does God protect us from those and if he doesn't, are we under his judgement?

Let's talk about Judgement. The amazing good news of The Gospel is that for those who repent of their lives lived independently of God, with all of its short comings, its pride, its dis-regard of God's values, its woeful attitudes and treatment of others, its de-valuing of ourselves and all the carnage that results, God has removed the judgement due to us. He has taken it away and taken it upon himself, so that we never have to experience it. That's awesome!

"Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."

- John 11:25 ESV

truthforlife.org



God never promises that our lives will be free of trouble. In fact, we are assured that in this life, trouble will come. We are not promised immunity from pain and hardship. Yes, God sometimes does bring miracles, let's never stop seeking those, but sometimes he takes us through difficult times to learn something important. Sometimes he might reveal bad decisions or life-style choices that have contributed towards what we are going through, and he shows us new paths to walk in as we experience more of what it means to live as citizens of heaven.

Whatever we go through, whether good times or difficult times, we are safe under the tender protection of God as we discover more of him and grow to become more like him, and at some point when our time here is done and our physical bodies fail, we will experience the full measure of our safety in God as we find that far from our lives being diminished, they are transformed into a greater, multi-dimensional reality as we await the glorious resurrection. We get to come back with new bodies like the one Jesus has, when he rose as a first fruit of all that we will be, new bodies with all parts working properly, no need for pain management or medication. No need for wheel chairs or walking frames, or tubes for this and that, or chemo-therapy, or inhalers. No need for mental health units or anti-depressants or steroids or ventilators or vaccines.

As portrayed so honestly throughout many of the psalms, we are living real life in the real world, where two dimensions operate simultaneously. Without denying the pain of the earthly dimension of our lives, the people of God **can** live joyfully, confidently and dependently on the Most High, Almighty, Lord, God who is the even greater reality behind the eternal dimension. **God is a safe place to be!** Amen



May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God and the fellowship of The Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.