

WHERE CAN I FIND SECURITY?**PSALM 125**

Is being safe important to you? Is feeling secure high on your list of desirable possessions? Some people approach life from a safety first mentality. Apparently, for them the key to living well is living safely. Lock your doors at night. Get an alarm system. Save 10% of your income and make sure your investment is insured. Take your vitamins, minerals, omega-3s, and St. John's Wort. Eat lots of soluble fibers. Exercise. Get eight hours of sleep. Wear a crash helmet. Drive a big car, because it's the safest if an accident happens. Don't go on mission trips to places where you might contract staph infection, malaria, intestinal parasites, or face a terrorist plot. Eat organic. Get a colonoscopy. There, that should do it. Now you're safe, right? Well, not really. Remember Pistol Pete Maravich? He was a great basketball player, an extraordinary athlete, and a specimen of fine health who died at the age of forty. He didn't smoke or drink. Meanwhile, the oldest woman on record, Jeanne Calment, who died at the age of 122, stopped smoking at age 117 because her eyesight was so bad she could no longer see clearly enough to light her cigarettes. Go, figure....

Feeling safe and secure is a legitimate human need. We live in a dangerous world. Where can you find security? Where can you find real safety from life's dangers? That's a question Psalm 125 answers. This summer we're reflecting on several psalms that answer big questions we all ask about life and living. Now, your Bible might tell you that Psalm 125 is a "song of ascent." What's a "song of ascent"? Several times a year, the Jewish people would make their way to the city of Jerusalem for different worship celebrations at the temple that had been built there. Because Jerusalem is higher in elevation than much of the surrounding countryside, you literally have to ascend or go up to get into the city. As groups of people made their way up to the city, they would sing songs together. In the book of Psalms, Psalms 120-134 are at least a partial collection of these songs of ascent.

Let's read Psalm 125 just now. Safety and security - that's the theme of this psalm. "Those who trust in the Lord are as unshakeable, as unmovable as mighty Mount Zion! (another name for Jerusalem) Just as the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord's *wrap-around* presence surrounds his people, protecting them now and forever." (Ps. 125:1-2 TPT) I'm reminded today that...

GOD IS BIGGER THAN MY NEGATIVE FEELINGS.

Our emotions – our feelings – are a powerful fact of life. Sometimes we can struggle with feelings of discouragement, doubt, and fear. But the fact is that our feelings – even our negative feelings – don't tell us anything real or true about God Himself. Negative feelings can be triggered by just about anything: poor health, the illness or death of a loved one, tension at work, loneliness, financial worries, and uncertainties about what the future will mean for us. This psalm says, "Those who trust in the Lord are as unshakeable, as unmovable as mighty Mount Zion!" (Ps. 125:1 TPT) But we all get shaken up by life! I know I do. I can be full of faith one day, and then consumed with

doubt or fear the next. The fact is it doesn't take much to shake up my life. I'm pretty susceptible to negative feelings, aren't you? Unshakeable. I wish that were true of me.

As the Jewish people ascended – literally and physically went up – to the city of Jerusalem, they were impressed by the solidity and stableness of what they saw. Sturdy mountains surrounded the city protecting it from enemy attack. It was obvious how well God had provided protection, safety, and security for the place where His presence resided. So, it was just natural for whoever wrote this psalm to compare Jerusalem's safety to the safety anyone should have who trusts in the Lord. "Just as the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord's *wrap-around* presence surrounds his people, protecting them now and forever." (Ps. 125:2 TPT) We need to hear and receive that essential message again today and often. Because we are followers of Jesus, we get our sense of security and safety on the basis of who God is rather than how we might feel on any given day. Part of following Jesus is a decision to live by what we know about God instead of what we may feel about life, about ourselves, or about others. My feelings are not reality. My negative feelings are not reality. They don't tell me anything real or important about God either.

Where do we go to find out what is real and true about God? Scripture. When you read the Bible – and this is especially true of the book of Psalms – we hear over and over again that God is faithful and trustworthy. He is absolutely reliable despite the doubts our negative feelings might create. We find that great truth everywhere and often in Scripture. Here's just a sample! "His massive arms are wrapped around you, protecting you. You can run under his covering of majesty and hide. His arms of faithfulness are a shield keeping you from harm." (Ps. 91:4 TPT) "Now I know, Lord, that you are for me, and I will never fear what man can do to me." (Ps. 118:6 TPT) "Fear and intimidation is a trap that holds you back. But when you place your confidence in the Lord, you will be seated in the high place." (Pr. 29:25 TPT)

The fact is you and I will struggle with negative feelings all through our lives. It's just a fact of life. But we don't have to be ruled, overwhelmed, or conquered by negative feelings. Instead, consciously and intentionally remind yourself of what God has said about Himself in His Word and refuse to believe your negative feelings. Preach to yourself. Remind yourself of who God is and what He's done. Choose to believe in God and the facts about God more than the message you get from your negative feelings. "Those who trust in the LORD are as secure as Mount Zion; they will not be defeated but will endure forever. Just as the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, both now and forever." (Ps. 125:1-2 NLT) Receive it. Meditate on it. Let the truth of it become bigger than your negative feelings.

Imagine with me a 3 year old boy being held up by his dad in the middle of a pool. Just for fun, Dad begins walking slowly toward the deep end, gently chanting, "Deeper and deeper and deeper." As the water rises higher and higher around the child, you can see some negative feelings reflected on his face: anxiety, doubt, fear. He grabs on to Dad even more tightly than before. If he had the capacity to analyze his situation, he'd realize he had nothing to worry about. The water anywhere in the pool is over his head.

Even the shallow end of the pool is a place he'd drown if it wasn't for Dad. His safety anywhere in that pool depends on Dad. There will be times your life and mine when we will feel "out of our depth." Negative feelings of anxiety, doubt, and fear will be strong. But the fact is you and I have never been in control of our lives anyway. We're always being held up by our Father's grace, our Father's power, and our Father's absolute trustworthiness. God is never out of His depth, so we're always safe and secure when life takes us deeper than we've ever been before. Psalm 125 reminds me of another truth.

GOD IS BIGGER THAN LIFE'S DIFFICULTIES.

It seems to me whoever wrote this psalm wasn't a stranger to life's difficulties. Verse 3 says, "The wicked will not always rule over the godly, provoking them to do what is evil." (Ps. 125:3 TPT) You might already know back in Old Testament times the nation of Israel was often under the control of one of the other surrounding nations. It was one way God punished His people if they drifted away from Him spiritually into idolatry. He would allow one of the surrounding nations to defeat them militarily and they'd have to serve that country's rulers until they repented and turned back to the Lord. Apparently, this psalm was written during a time of just such national difficulty.

It's not just negative feelings that can make us feel insecure and unsafe. So can life's difficulties. They remind us we don't have much control over much of anything. We pray about difficulties - sure - but God doesn't always seem to answer our prayers about life's difficulties in the way we want Him to. Life's difficulties can leave us feeling very insecure. Again, the psalmist wrote these words in a time of national difficulty. The people of Israel were being dominated by a foreign power. How could he have such confidence in God's goodness and God's power to deliver? Because He knew that any and all difficulties in life are temporary. "The wicked will not always rule over the godly..." (Ps. 125:3 TPT) Yes, God did permit godless pagans to triumph - on occasion - over His people just as - on occasion - He allows difficulties into your life and mine - failure, pain, grief, discouragement, loss, uncertainty, heartache, and loneliness. When that happens, you and I can affirm what the psalmist affirmed here: it will not last forever. Nothing that contradicts God's goodness and character lasts forever.

The psalmist wrote, "The scepter of the wicked will not remain over the land allotted to the righteous, for then the righteous might use their hands to do evil." (Ps. 125:3 NIV) In other words, if evil or life's difficulties were permanent or eternal, then God's people might conclude God wasn't really in control after all or God didn't care about them. If life's difficulties lasted forever, even the most committed follower of Jesus would likely give up on God. We might conclude pursuing what was good or evil made little difference after all. But the psalmist knew God was eternal and forever - not the presence of evil or life's difficulties. When you face any and every difficulty in life, remember it's temporary at best. True, some of life's difficulties are very hard, very dark indeed. But they aren't bigger than God. And they don't last forever. God, however, does last forever.

I recall having lunch with a young, single follower of Jesus who was thoroughly discouraged by the difficulties in his life. He was definitely going through one of those times in life when the downs were more than the ups. He wanted to get married and have a family, but God hadn't brought that special someone into his life yet. His mother – someone he'd been very close to in life – had died a few years earlier and he still suffered from profound feelings of grief over her. My heart went out to this young man who had become so discouraged by life's difficulties. I was thankful to be able to say to Him – because God's Word says it, "My friend, these times will not last forever. Hold on to God. Keep doing the right things in the right way. These difficult times will not last."

Difficulties in life are a fact of life and will be until we get to Heaven or Jesus returns. We all face them – some great, some small, some that shatter our souls, and some that end up being just passing annoyances. Regardless, we can live with the assurance God is greater than all of life's difficulties put together. They will not have the last word in our lives; He will. The last verse of Psalm 125 says, "May Israel experience peace and prosperity!" (Ps. 125:5 TPT) We are the equivalent of Israel today – we who put our trust and faith in Jesus alone. We can live every day with a triumphant sense of safety because God knows us, because we know He never abandons His people, and because we're confident what God has started in us He will surely finish. As the Bible says, "And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns." (Ph. 1:6 NLT)

One of the riskiest, most unsafe, and most insecure jobs you could ever do was big bridge construction. It required men to be on top of swaying catwalks and high towers, sometimes hundreds of feet in the air, blown around by the winds. Officials came to expect the inevitable human cost of building a big bridge. For every one million dollars spent in construction one life would be lost. When it came to the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, however, engineers believed the risks could be lowered. When construction began back in 1932, numerous safety measures were put into place and strictly enforced. Things like mandatory use of hard hats, special eye glasses, a strict rule against showing off which became a cause for automatic firing, tie-off lines, and an on-site hospital helped to greatly reduce the casualty rate. Over nearly four years of construction and \$20 million spent, only one worker died. The most effective safety device, without question, was as new to bridge building back then as it was old to the circus - the use of a trapeze net. This large net cost \$130,000 and was draped below the roadbed under construction, extending ten feet to either side. So effective was the safety net that the newspapers began running box scores: "Score on the Gate Bridge Safety Net to Date: 8 Lives Saved!" Beyond that, the net had another significant benefit - it freed many of the workers from an often paralyzing sense of fear. And that, many said, helped them work more productively.

In a troubled and frightening world full of life's difficulties, the Bible tells us where we can find the most safety and security of all. God is indeed the ultimate safety net. "Those who trust in the LORD are as secure as Mount Zion; they will not be defeated but will endure forever. Just as the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, both now and forever." (Ps. 125:1-2 NLT)