

*“How can we sing
the songs of the Lord
in a foreign land?”*
Psalm 137:4

Our natural inclination, of course, is to stop singing when we're sad, disappointed, or in pain. But Jesus sang as He faced His darkest hour, just as Paul and Silas would one day sing while in chains in a Philippian jail. Follow the Lord's lead and ask God to put a song in your heart.

A Spectacle of Glory/ Joni E. Tada

GRIEF

Lettie's Facebook Post: Prayers for Phil – June, 2013

Pondering: As much as I resist this thought, I believe the truth of it. Sometimes trials are not so much about the people living them as they are about those observing or on the fringes of them. I thought I discovered this during the last days of Tom's (my first husband) cancer. It may, at least partially, be about obedience by those who are called to offer exceptional prayer, exceptional giving, or exceptional service. It may be, as it was with Tom, about someone overcoming their fear and donating blood for the first time, about leaving a comfort zone and extending mercy, as those who sat for the first time beside Phil's bed or did a nursing home overnight with him as he struggled to breathe or cough.

This would mean, of course, that our pain and suffering are expendable to God's greater purposes. I do consider this with great difficulty, but I would want to be willing to accept that a greater good is worth a significant sacrifice. I have certainly not arrived at the place of this amazing quote; "God has made me bread for His elect, and if it be needful that the bread must be ground into the teeth of the lion to feed His children, blessed be the name of the Lord." (Ignatius) I am afraid this is not so for me yet.

Rather, I often ask God, "What is so significant to your glory that this pain and loss is required of us?" And I have offered, instead, a willingness for my heart to be made more willing to endure with patience His will through the sorrow.



1

Lost Songs

“Sing, O Daughter of Zion.”

Zephaniah 3:14 NIV

From my place on the pew, I watch my friend in the choir singing lively songs of praise and God’s glory. Her face reflects only peace and worship. Yet knowing her private grief and multiple losses, I marvel that she still sings. Her faithfulness is my inspiration.

In my own tragedies and wilderness of personal pain, I often found that I lost my song. During my husband’s dark days in ICU and his subsequent nursing home months, I would leave his bedside and enter our empty house. As I climbed into bed overwhelmed with exhaustion, sadness, and fear of the future, I would remind God of Zephaniah 3:17 and ask God to sing over me so I could sleep. I also asked Him to give me a song to anchor my heart with hope.

Laura Story, worship leader and author of the anointed song, *Blessings*, also struggled to regain her song after personal tragedy. In the early days of her marriage, her husband endured brain surgery that resulted in permanent personality changes. She wrestled with the ensuing role reversals and uncertain future. In her book *When God Doesn’t Fix It*, she expressed her struggle. “How do I stand in front of the congregation and sing about how great God is when I don’t feel like he’s been great to me?”

Most of us, choosing honesty, have sung without believing the words, or, as I often did, sat in silence and let others enjoy worshipping. But somehow it seemed my friend in the choir was experiencing a special grace that allowed her to sing in

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spite of her pain. My songs (and the will to worship) are slowly returning. We have the song *Blessings* because Laura Story's journey through heartache allowed her to hear and sing a different song that has impacted countless lives.

God's word clearly reveals His heart for us to praise and worship through song. But He also knows and understands when our song is lost. Songs can be silenced by the Enemy when we feel abandoned, weary, overwhelmed, doubtful, hurting and isolated. Do you need to pray for Him to make His presence known and to give you a new or restored song?

Today's Prayer: O God, life without song is life without joy. Pour Your music into hurting hearts. Teach us to sing even through heartache and pain.

Today's Scripture: Zephaniah 3:14-17



4

Consumed and Changed

*“Yet he knows the way I have taken;
when he has tested me,
I will emerge as gold.”*

Job 23:10

I remember listening to musician Steve Green sing a beautiful song called “The Refiner’s Fire”. The song spoke of a fire with “sacred heat” that changed forever those who passed through its flames. I knew something of fiery trials, but the refiner’s fire took on a whole new depth of meaning as I experienced the five-year post stroke period that preceded the death of my courageous husband. He required 24-hour care and there was nothing in our lives that was not a casualty of his massive stroke.

I did come out of those years in the refiner’s fire forever changed. As I began making my way beyond those painful days of loss and grief, I was finally able to give voice to some of the lessons I learned in what seemed to be an endless trial.

1. Sometimes God’s ways are absolute mystery (Isaiah 55:8-9) as well as incomprehensible. (Romans 11:33) There will be seasons in our walk with God that cannot be understood or explained. In His sovereign purposes, He sometimes permits trials that bring what appears to be endless destruction. Our faith will be tested and we will be forced to rest in the anchor of His word.
2. God’s truth trumps our feelings . . . every time. There were times in the refiner’s fire that we “felt” forgotten or forsaken. Our hearts questioned God’s faithfulness and our own faith. How do we count this all joy? Is God

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really good? What about His promises? In those dark places, God most often sent His messengers through those reaching out in the Body of Christ.

3. God somehow “shines” through us in the darkest places of our lives. We saw through those years that other lives were impacted and changed as they prayed for us, provided for us, and showed up to help us meet the challenges of our daily needs. Over 1000 people followed us on Facebook, rejoicing in victories and carrying us through difficult days.
4. God limits the duration of our trials, but it is His plan, His way. My husband’s courage, perseverance, and faith touched countless lives. Living with him, caring for him, and watching him fight to take back his losses was both heartbreaking, inspirational, and convicting. The day God set him free for life everlasting was truly both bitter and sweet.

John Piper wrote a book called *Don't Waste Your Suffering*. It is certainly my heart cry that both glory for God and new purpose for me would be found in the ashes of the refiner’s fire.

Today’s Prayer: Father, thank you that You will not let us go. Reveal Your presence to those facing fiery trials.

Today’s Scripture: Isaiah 43: 1-3

6

In the Moment

*“Watch! Be alert!
For you don’t know when
the time is coming.”*

Mark 13:33

I would like to believe that a “benefit” of my husband’s stroke and my subsequent years of caregiving has been a new ability to live in the moment. But, in truth, it has primarily given me a fresh understanding of the significance of living in the moment as a good goal to strive for.

I’ve tended to be a look ahead person most of my life. Anticipation and preparation were a side effect of the pursuit of organization with four sons, a special needs daughter, and live-in grandmother. I thought “pre-paration” was my key to functioning well. It was also, of course, very much part of my female need for control.

But when suddenly faced with a tragedy the magnitude of horrific stroke, it was all my mind, body, and emotions could do to survive the assault of grief, financial chaos, and the fight for faith. I then discovered some things can only be endured a moment at a time.

God understands that, of course. His message to us has always been consistent with living in the moment. Even Jesus modeled this as He journeyed toward the cross one day at a time – discipling, healing, teaching, declaring the love of His Father for even those who would crucify Him. He reminded followers that only God knows the end, but we must be vigilant and watchful.

In the moments of our days, we are also encouraged to:

- Be still and know God (Psalm 46:10)
- Be anxious in nothing (Philippians 4:6)
- Face tomorrow without fear (Mathew 6:34)

So, how do we do it? How do we live in the moment instead of anticipating what's next?

1. Breathe. Slowly, deeply. It really can help.
2. Remember Truth. Rehearse God's promises, names, and character. Sing a praise song.
3. Turn to Him. Nehemiah used Roman Candle prayers. Shoot a cry toward heaven. Sometimes "Help" is the best word there is.
4. Focus on now – the person, the place, even the problem.

Somehow, I think I'm not alone in this need to pursue moment by moment life as God intends. Let's ask the One who knows us best to teach us to value the now moments and trust Him, as the Alpha and Omega who knows the end from the beginning.

Today's Prayer: God we know You are I Am, all-sufficient, all knowing, the Beginning and the End. Teach us how to live in the middle of all the moments and time in between.

Today's Scripture: Mark 13: 32-37