

## Reflections of Hope and Encouragement in a Time of Disaster and Suffering



### Do Not Worry

#### Read Matthew 6: 25-34

*“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”*

Matthew 6: 34 Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by [Biblica, Inc.](#)®

Christ’s call ‘not to worry’, is not about having an absence of worries. The focus of the passage is not worrying about the material things of life. We are called to capture the vision of the Kingdom of God, where all join in working for the common good, just as the early Church lived out and which we hear about in Acts. As we so often see in natural disasters, communities often rally together to look after those in need, this is perhaps a natural embracing of being made in the image of God. May we all find ways to be generous in our giving of ourselves and our resources as we seek to live the love of Jesus into the world.

#### Prayer

Today, Christ,  
We are worried,  
For there are many troubles,  
More than enough,  
Which so many are facing.  
We are not seeking more stuff like food and clothing to add to what we already have,  
But we pray for those who do not have enough,  
Those continuing under the oppression of poverty,  
Those facing an uncertain future in the wake of natural disaster,  
Fires,  
Floods,  
Famines  
And drought.  
We are worried for those whose lives might be lost,

Those who are potential victims of suffering,  
And those who are prepared to lay down their lives to serve and save others.  
We are worried for those whose grief is great,  
And whose mental health and wellbeing is under threat.  
So, trying not to be anxious,  
We name our worries,  
We are thankful for your presence and compassion,  
And that you are at work in the world.  
We bring all these people and worries to you in prayer and petition,  
Looking to your peace,  
Which passes all understanding,  
To guard our hearts and minds in this trying time.  
This day, we pray.  
Amen

### ‘My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?’

#### Read Psalm 22

*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?”*

- Psalm 22: 1 Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by [Biblica, Inc.](#)®

There is nothing as raw and honest as some of the prayers in the Psalms. This is the psalm that Jesus cried on the cross, and it captures our sense of suffering and feeling of Godforsakenness. However, we know that God is always with us, just as God was fully with Jesus in his suffering. We have full scriptural warrant to be honestly and frankly pray our feelings to God. It can sometimes feel that God is far away and feel like God seems to be doing nothing to help us. Miracles are something that many of us have yet to experience, and might never get to. Yet, when we let our feelings out in prayer, then it is often the case that the Holy Spirit is able to be at work as comforter,



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helper and advocate. May it be for us as for the psalmist, that once the we have been able to vent that our thoughts might shift and likewise we can affirm the prayer *"But you, Lord, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me"*

### Prayer

Our God, Our God,  
Why does it feel that you have forsaken us?  
Why is so much of what we hold dear burnt or washed away?  
Why is what we worked for decimated and destroyed? How do we recover from such devastation and suffering? Where will we find hope?  
Surely, our hope is in you,  
For you are with us as the Christ,  
And as the Spirit.  
The stuff of life might be taken away,  
We might lose loved ones,  
Our circumstances and situation unalterably changed,  
But your love is with us.  
In Jesus we can find hope.  
In the Scriptures we can find encouragement.  
Help us to put out of our minds the trite platitudes of the well-meaning,  
And immerse ourselves in the grit of your way,  
Which too often knows suffering,  
But which lifts our souls,  
And brings peace which transcends all understanding.  
God, please be our help and strength in our struggles,  
This we truly pray.  
Amen.

## God Is Not in the Fire or Earthquake

### Read 1 Kings 19:11-13

*"...but the Lord was not in the fire."*

- 1 Kings 19: 12 Holy Bible, New International Version® Anglicized, NIV®  
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When the Prophet Elijah was facing the hardships of persecution, he sought to withdraw to safety (dare we say run away?) - although with good reason. We may not be facing persecution, but many are facing disaster and suffering. Elijah's story is a reminder that life in the service of God can be hard and that faith is not a guarantee of an easy life. In times of extreme difficulty, including natural disasters, it is good to remember that just as in this story, God is not necessarily in the acts of nature such as fire or earthquake as their direct cause. However, we can believe that God is present in our circumstances as a still small voice, calling those of us who are followers of Jesus, who are the apostolic (*"sent out"*) Church reminding us that God is not just with us but even in the face of hardship, always leads us into the world in mission to share the message of compassion, love, and hope, not only in words, but in our love and good deeds.

### Prayer

Floods,  
Fires,  
Droughts,  
Earthquakes,  
Landslides,  
Hurricanes, typhoons, tornados and cyclones,  
The world tosses and turns us,  
It throws us challenges and troubles,  
It leaves us with struggles and suffering,  
And you are not in these things,



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At least not as the cause,  
But as Immanuel - God with us,  
For you are with us and all who struggle  
Bring your comfort, God,  
Floods,  
Fires,  
Droughts,  
Earthquakes,  
Landslides,  
Hurricanes, typhoons, tornados and cyclones,  
The world tosses and turns us,  
It throws us challenges and troubles,  
It leaves us with struggles and suffering,  
And yet, you are not in these things,  
At least not as the cause,  
But you are present as the still small voice which  
sends us back into the world,  
To share your message of hope,  
And to live compassion and love to all in need.  
Gather your people to join with you in your  
caring,  
Opening hearts and mind in compassion.  
Christ,  
You lead us to see all as neighbours,  
And command us to love them as ourselves.  
You truly are God with us,  
This is why we pray.  
Amen

### When We Walk Through the Fire

#### Read Isaiah 43: 1-4

*"When you walk through the fire, you will not be  
burned; the flames will not set you ablaze, for I am  
the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your  
Saviour."*

Isaiah 43: 2 Holy Bible, New International Version® Anglicized, NIV®  
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We have a lot of encouragement in the Scriptures. In times of disasters such as bushfires and floods, we may turn to passages such as from the Prophet Isaiah for comfort, but at the same time wonder at such promises when we see the devastation of floods and fires which afflict people regardless of their faith. We have seen people places flooded and burnt, but at the same time know the truth of God's Word. We know that God's people throughout time have had the same experience. Faith is not a force-field which holds the ills and suffering of life at bay. We may not fully comprehend the full meaning of such promises, nor why there has to be such awful happenings in the world, but we can know that whilst our spirits may get singed sometimes and the light of our faith threatened to be drowned by the hardships of life, especially in the devastation of loss, God is faithful and will bring us through such trying times. When we place our trust in God through the Spirit and in Christ, our saviour, we can find and have hope. This love of God will bring us through all things, even though it might involve time and struggles. May we know that God is with us and is able to fill our lives and living in ways which help us recover after suffering.

#### Prayer

Immanuel,  
God with us,  
It is you in whom we put our faith.  
Who else could we turn to in times of  
desperation and devastation?  
Who else can we truly seek to bring us through  
times of hardship and suffering?  
Who else can bring us through grief and loss?  
Your promises are true and we hold them in our  
hearts.  
Sometimes we struggle in our minds to  
understand their meaning,



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And it can be a challenge to our faith when things don't go the way we expect them to and we have to endure suffering and trials,  
But we know that you have never stepped away from us,  
In you deep compassion, as Christ you have lived through pain and persecution,  
You have even endured death to bring us resurrection, redemption and hope.  
In your love, bring us through the worst of life,  
Through its flames and floods.  
Enfold us in communion as your people,  
That we might not only receive help and support when we need,  
But embody it for others as seek to be your Church,  
As we give of ourselves,  
Just as you give of yourself.  
This we honestly seek to pray.  
Amen.

### Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death

#### Read Psalm 23

*"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."*

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It is said that life wasn't meant to be easy. In the light of Genesis, may be we can question this. However, most of us know that life includes difficult times and hardships. We hope that these might be minimal, but natural disasters and tragedies, remind us how fragile that hope can be sometimes. Suffering is a part of life that needs to be faced. We shouldn't give in to pessimism and we should never give up our hope. However, when we face the troubles of life and call on God to bring us through them, then we are more likely to find healing and recovery. It is natural to feel what we feel, and anger is a

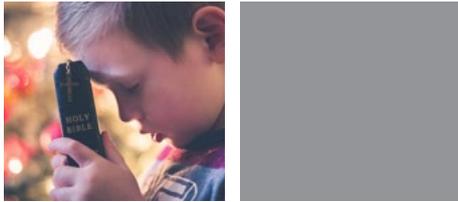
part of shock and grief, but we should not give in to bitterness and despair. With the love of God for us, and having it as a gift to share with others, we can find meaning and purpose in our living and help others do the same as we share the blessings of the compassion and grace of God.

#### Prayer

It is there God.  
We don't want it to be.  
We try to ignore it  
We try to shut it out.  
We try to pretend it is not real, or that it is not real for us.  
But it is there, right in our faces sometimes,  
Particularly in the wake of disasters,  
– the darkness  
– the sad side  
– the valley of the shadow of death.  
And even though we know that you are with us, and you are there to comfort us,  
Our fear makes it hard to face  
and we would often give anything just to avoid having to live through such times and experiences.  
The scriptures remind us that such struggles as these carry blessings which arise from the tribulations, but we would have you save us from such times of trial.  
And yet we know that suffering is an unavoidable part of our existence.  
God save us in the times of trial and deliver us from evils.  
May we be humble enough to ask for help.  
May we share our burdens with each other, that in giving of ourselves we may receive care and support, and in receiving the cares of others we might give love and comfort.  
Help us to find hope and bring hope to others.  
May we not vomit the bile of our suffering upon people we may encounter,



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But give us the faith to vent our pain and hurt to you  
 Bear our anger and frustration,  
 Our ignorance and accusations,  
 Just as you bore such pain on the Cross.  
 Redeem our suffering and grow within us the seeds of healing and wholeness.  
 that we might find faith enough to grasp your love.  
 Bless us with your peace that we might be a blessing to others.  
 May your compassion dwell within us that we might embody it for others.  
 May we be patient and graceful.  
 May we be kind and grace-filled.  
 God of love,  
 May we recognise your presence,  
 in the touch of your Spirit,  
 in the people we encounter  
 and in our human being.  
 Jesus walk with us  
 Calm the tempest within us  
 Lead us in your way into hope and the future.  
 This we pray.  
 Amen.

**All is Not Lost**

**Read John 1: 1-14**

*“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”*

All is not lost, even in the worst of circumstances and the hardest of situations. The light of love cannot be extinguished. Christ is the Word of God incarnate, the light of the world. In Christ all is redeemed, not only in terms of eternal salvation, but in the renewal of creation and all situations and circumstances. This is not usually in big, miraculous ways, but in the small renewing of our minds in hope and grace, and through our joining with God in the work

of compassion and love, which in the face of disaster can be miraculous in itself.

**Prayer**

God of hope and resurrection,  
 As Christ you know pain, death and loss.  
 In the face of devastation,  
 In the face of suffering,  
 In the face of grief and mourning,  
 In the face of pain and hurting,  
 We might name you present,  
 And pray our hearts out for change,  
 But hope is hard.  
 Peace takes work.  
 Joy seems a far reach,  
 And love appears to be all that remains.  
 Miracles do not often abound,  
 They are there,  
 Scattered like jewels in the ground,  
 But for many the only option is to live through the hardship,  
 Trusting in your way,  
 And looking to love and support from others.  
 All is not lost,  
 Compassion and care lives in the human spirit,  
 Created there in your image,  
 Waiting to be awakened,  
 By the need of others.  
 All is not lost.  
 Hope remains.  
 The light of love cannot be extinguished.  
 Grace is always at the ready.  
 The way is hard.  
 Tears flow like rivers.  
 Frustration and hurt fuels anger which threatens to corrupt any good.  
 Loss is everywhere.  
 But all is not lost,



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For you hold our future,  
And you are with us always.  
God we trust in you,  
Wake us up so that we can join with you,  
In your work to bring hope and healing,  
Open up generosity in our souls,  
That the rich might not be poor in spirit,  
And that all might unite for the common good for  
all.  
All is not lost,  
But it takes us to help those who have lost all,  
And so we pray with you.  
Amen.

### Do Not Be Anxious

#### Read Philippians 4: 6-7

*“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

Too often words like hope, peace and love roll off our tongues like platitudes. As followers of Jesus, we need to remember their very real power in times of trouble and the fact that the incarnation of God in the person of the Christ means that God is with us. However, we also need to remember that these things require grit, effort and prayer, if we are to take up our crosses and follow the Christ. Hope, peace and love are not just things that God gives to us for ourselves alone, but also for others. These are things that we can work for, but might require a shift in our thinking through prayer to make them real. In prayer we may then see the outworking of these things in our world and offer them to those we come into contact with just as Christ offers them to us.

#### Praying the Peace of God

Christ,  
Source of peace,  
The Scriptures say, *“Do not be anxious about anything,”*

But this is hard,  
Especially in times of devastation and strife,  
When hope seems faint and the future so uncertain.  
The Scriptures say, “In every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God,”  
There is so much to pray for,  
With so many needs and so much wrong with the world,  
And it seems sometimes that there is so little to be thankful for,  
But, let us try to heed this instruction,  
Let us pray our concerns to you in the way of the psalms  
Opening in ourselves in compassion to the needs of God,  
And seeking to be grateful for the good that we hold.  
The Scriptures say, “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus,”  
May this truly be so in your wisdom and way,  
We fervently pray.  
Amen.

### God Comforts Us in All Our Troubles

#### Read 2 Corinthians 1: 3-5

*“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.”*

God is with us and is our source of comfort and support. It isn't always easy to accept this. It isn't always easy to feel or believe this, but it is a truth that has been attested to throughout the ages.



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It is the promise of the Word of God. It is the stuff of faith and something that we should strive to be mindful of at all times. We can honestly share our struggles with doubt and faith but in the end, choosing to stand on what we know to be the promises of God are an important aspect of our witness to others as disciples. In these difficult days, may we honestly lament before God, but then may we stand firm and look to him for peace in the present and hope in the future.

### Prayer

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Spirit,  
God,  
Christ,  
You are always with us,  
Whether we perceive it or not.  
You are always working for our good,  
Whether we know it or not.  
You are always there for comfort and help,  
Whether we call on it or not.  
You are always calling us onward in hope,  
Whether we listen or not.  
You are always the giver of compassion and comfort,  
Whether we accept it or not.  
You are not the cause of our troubles or sufferings,  
Whether we believe it or not.  
In all things and at all times your hand is on our lives,  
Whether we feel it or not.  
You are God,  
Leading us to our better selves and working to redeem all people and all things,  
Whether we have faith or not.  
This simply is, and so shall it always be.  
Amen.

