

Walking Through

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me (Psalm 23:4, *KJV*).

Scripture: Psalm 23

Song: “Softly and Tenderly”

Despite an awkward interview, I received an offer for a full-time teaching position one week before my college graduation. My professors joked that I didn’t need a diploma since I already had a job! Of course, I still walked through the late-May graduation ceremony, grateful that I knew where I would be in August.

During the months between college and career, I lived in the suburbs of Minneapolis. When I notified my landlords that I’d be leaving at the end of summer, they were gracious with my lease. And while there, I enjoyed my temporary typist job as I looked ahead to teaching. In the process of going from one stage of life to the next, I lived with peace and happy anticipation.

When we know death is merely a walkway into our eternal lives, it lifts our fear. We can pass through death’s shadow certain of our destination. Under the tender guidance of our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, we can confidently and bravely continue on in the valley. With joyful hope for what is to come, we walk through these temporary shadows toward our new home.

Father, thank You for the promise that the dark valley of death is simply a passageway to continued vibrant life with You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

January 9–15. **Sara Schaffer** lives in Colorado with her husband and two daughters. She hosts a podcast, speaks at various Christian events, and is involved in local ministries.

Too Weak for Practical Use

Though I am like a wineskin in the smoke, I do not forget your decrees (Psalm 119:83).

Scripture: Psalm 119:81-96

Song: “O My Soul, March On”

Civil war raged in France during the late sixteenth century. Wracked by coughing fits, Queen Jeanne D’Albret of the Huguenots pressed on day after day in her war room, strategizing battle. She wanted her people to have freedom of religion. At night, as coughing kept her awake, she prayed, asking God for wisdom, help, and victory. On the eve of a critical assault, she made the decision to go to visit soldiers herself.

The queen’s arrival in the army camp surprised but heartened the soldiers. Though clearly in fragile health, her strong faith rallied the spirits of the fighters. The commander presented her with a bold attack plan. Trusting God with their cause, she approved it, and the victory was soon won. In times of darkness and near defeat, the queen stabilized herself on the solid character of God as revealed in Scripture.

Like smoke withers a wineskin, so tuberculosis had withered Jeanne D’Albret. Physically cracked, brittle, and too weak for practical use by any physical assessment, she was a woman of faith who was strengthened by the hand of Almighty God. Like the psalmist, she knew and relied on God’s character, not her own. In the midst of circumstances that weaken us, are we remembering God’s Word and His trustworthiness? May our faith truly result in bold actions and words that honor our loving Father.

Father, during times when I am emotionally and physically fragile, I will trust in Your eternal faithfulness. In Jesus’ name, amen.

“English Air”

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding (Proverbs 3:5).

Scripture: Proverbs 3:1-15

Song: “Breath of Heaven”

In the early 1920s, Great Britain commissioned several explorations to Mount Everest. The goal was to discover a path to the top. One climber, Dr. George I. Finch, hypothesized that oxygen would be key to successfully summiting the highest mountain on earth. He believed it would combat the challenges of the thin atmosphere—such as difficulty breathing, which dangerously muddled thoughts.

Finch joined the second expedition in 1922. Unfortunately, altitude sickness temporarily stalled him at base camp. Meanwhile, more experienced climbers started up the mountain without extra air. Several days later, Finch and fellow climber Geoffrey Bruce, along with several porters, followed. When they set out from Camp 3, they began to use oxygen, with immediate benefits. While wearing their masks and breathing the “English air,” as their porters called it, Finch and Bruce easily made progress. On that trip they succeeded in ascending to a record-breaking altitude of 27,300 feet.

While we may seem to make progress without divine guidance, God offers to be our spiritual oxygen in life. By “breathing in” His Word regularly, we gain His clear perspective and can trust that He has us on sure footing. We are called to press on in life—a call that is difficult at times and full of challenges. Yet the Lord promises to lead us on straight paths that will gratify us more than any adventure we could attempt on our own.

Father, I trust You with the road before me as You provide each breath. In Jesus’ name, amen.

More Time

These [trials] have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (1 Peter 1:7).

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:3-12

Song: “Refine Me”

Every student in Jewelry 101 was failing. No one could get the metal to behave as needed for their pieces to form. Seeing the frustration of his class, the professor led a discussion, inviting hypotheses on the problem. Ideas bubbled from the group. Maybe the temperature of the flame should be hotter. Perhaps the fire was being held at the wrong angle. Finally, one student landed on the solution: more time. They needed to hold the flame under the metal longer to remove all the dross. Until all contaminants were out, the metal wouldn't be viscous enough to slide into the form and become a piece of jewelry. Excited at this revelation, the students went back to work, all of them eventually succeeding.

When we are under the “heat” of various trials, it may be that a longer refining time is necessary to completely prepare us for what God has for us. And God promises that the result of this process will be a genuine faith within us—a belief so refined, it will honor Jesus himself.

When we wonder why God is allowing difficulties to go on and on, may we rejoice in the purification of our lives to the praise of His glory.

Father, forgive me for complaining during prolonged suffering. Thank You for Your masterful work in my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

Beyond Everest

Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear (1 Peter 1:17).

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:13-25

Song: "Here I Am, Lord"

It was 1922 when Howard Somervell reached a record altitude of 26,985 feet on Mount Everest with George Mallory and Edward Norton. They achieved the phenomenal height without additional oxygen but with skill, tenacity, and humor. After the historic adventure in the Himalayas ended, most in the party returned home. Somervell remained, however, eventually joining the staff of a small missionary hospital in Travancore in southern India.

Somervell and the volunteer medical team saw 200,000 patients and did 15,000 surgeries a year. On his own, he saw as many as 150 poverty-stricken patients per day. His Everest companions described him as one with a gentle soul, an abiding humor, and a devout Christian faith. These traits, along with his brilliant medical skills and persistence, led to the care of countless patients throughout his career. A stranger in India, Dr. Somervell worked reverently and compassionately.

Because of the redemption and love of Christ, we are free to work hard and press into impossible tasks. Whether climbing or doctoring, Somervell labored with his hope firmly in Jesus. He was called beyond Everest into a 40-year career, caring for people far from the home he knew. May we too live as foreigners on this earth with our eyes focused on the hope that is to come.

Father, I want to live in awe of what You did for me. Show me how I can serve others today in reverence to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Paisley's Praise

“See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction” (Isaiah 48:10).

Scripture: Isaiah 48:1-11

Song: “Breathe on Me, Breath of God”

Her oxygen had been raised to its maximum, and still Paisley wasn't getting enough air to survive. COVID pneumonia ravaged her compromised pulmonary system. The doctors in the ICU insistently suggested putting her into a twilight state and intubating directly into her lungs. The procedure would sustain but diminish her life. She decided she would wait 24 hours, she said, “to see what God would do.” She put herself completely in the Lord's hands, and she demanded no extreme measures be taken to save her life.

Although ready to open her eyes in Heaven, Paisley awoke the next morning still in the hospital. To the shock of her doctors, her lungs had begun improving. Over the next several days, medical staff gradually reduced her supplemental oxygen, and within a week she was released into her daughter's care. Her recovery continued. A few months later, Paisley reported to friends that she had no prayer requests, only praises!

When tried by extreme affliction, Paisley entrusted herself to God. While grateful for the caring physicians tending her, she credited God himself for the miracle of her ongoing life. Medical professionals, friends, and family all witnessed her deep faith—and now see her even more solid stance that every breath is truly a gift from God. Glory be to Him!

Father, I praise You in the midst of my affliction and ask for Your glory to be seen through my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

Nurse's Orders

This is what the LORD says . . . “If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your well-being like the waves of the sea” (Isaiah 48:17-18).

Scripture: Isaiah 48:12-22

Song: “Trust and Obey”

In 1854, during the Crimean war, Florence Nightingale arrived in Crimea to horrific army hospital conditions. Patients were in unsanitary, crowded spaces. Their meals were watery stew. The building itself was falling apart. To make things worse, Nightingale and her nurses were ordered *not* to help unless military doctors expressly asked them to. Even so, Florence got to work doing what she could. She systemized nurse duties and rotations, implemented a meal plan to meet patients' specific needs, and prioritized hygiene and cleanliness.

Under Nightingale's care and oversight, the mortality rate dropped from 50 to 10 percent. She persistently kept records, gathered statistics, and offered proposals for improvements. (Once, she brought her concerns directly to Queen Victoria!) Florence made many things better for soldiers. But she wanted others to understand and trust her data, follow her methods, and thereby save more lives.

In today's passage, we see God expressing a desire for His people's well-being . . . and His frustration at their noncompliance. How God lamented over their needless suffering! And as we consider this, what about our own response to God? Do we profess to follow Christ and yet walk in our own ways, ignoring the path that brings life? Let's commit ourselves anew to following His instructions and abiding in His life-giving ways!

Father, thank You for the peace and well-being You provide when we follow Your commands. In Jesus' name, amen.