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Psalm 91 confession

Because I [Insert your name] dwell in the secret place of the most High, I shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.
2 I [Insert your name] will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.
3 Surely he shall deliver me, [Insert your name] from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.
4 He shall cover me, [Insert your name] with his feathers, and under his wings shall I trust; his truth shall be my shield and buckler.
5 I, [Insert your name] shall not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day;
6 Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.
7 A thousand shall fall at my side, and ten thousand at my right hand; but it shall not come nigh me.
8 Only with my eyes shall I behold and see the reward of the wicked.
9 Because I, [Insert your name] have made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, my habitation;
10 There shall no evil befall me, [Insert your name] neither shall any plague come nigh my dwelling.
11 For he shall give his angels charge over me, [Insert your name] to keep me in all my ways.
12 They shall bear me up in their hands, lest I dash my foot against a stone.
13 [Insert your name], shall tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shall I trample under feet.
14 Because I, [Insert your name] hath set my love upon Jesus Christ, therefore He will deliver me: He will set me on high, because I have known His name.
15 [Insert your name] shall call upon Him, and He will answer me; He will be with me in trouble; He will deliver me, and honor me.
16 With long life will He satisfy me, and shew me His salvation.
Psalm 91 Confession 1. I dwell in the secret place of the most High so I abide under the shadow of the Almighty.
2. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust."
3. Surely He shall deliver me from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence.
4. He shall cover me with His feathers, and under His wings I shall take refuge; His truth shall be my shield and buckler.
5. I shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day,
6. Nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.
7. A thousand may fall at my side, and ten thousand at my right hand; but it shall not come near me.
8. Only with my eyes shall I look, and see the reward of the wicked.
9. Because I have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, my habitation.
10. No evil shall befall me, nor shall any plague come near my dwelling;
11. For He shall give His angels charge over me, to keep me in all my ways.
12. They shall bear me up in their hands, lest I dash my foot against a stone.
13. I shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent I shall trample under foot.
14. Because I have set my love upon Him, therefore He will deliver me; He will set me on high, because I have known His name.
15. I shall call upon Him, and He will answer me; He will be with me in trouble; He will deliver me and honor me.
16. With long life He will satisfy me, and show me His salvation.
Go to Believers Home Page I dwell in the secret place of the most High and shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust."
Surely He shall deliver me from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence.
He shall cover me with His feathers, and under His wings I shall take refuge; His truth shall be my shield and buckler.
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A thousand may fall at my side, And ten thousand at my right hand; But it shall not come near me.
Only with your eyes shall I look, And see the reward of the wicked.
Because I have known the LORD, who is my refuge, Even the Most High, my dwelling place, No evil shall befall me, Nor shall any plague come near my dwelling.
For He shall give His angels charge over me, To keep me in all my ways.
In their hands they shall bear me up, Lest I dash my foot against a stone.
I shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, The young lion and the serpent I shall trample underfoot.
"Because I has set his love upon You Oh Lord, You will deliver me; You will set me on high, because I have known My name.
I shall call upon You, and You will answer me; You will be with me in trouble; You will deliver me and honor me.
With long life You will satisfy me, And show me Your salvation."
Here is a link to a copy of Psalm 91 rewritten in first-person singular.
I highly recommend this as a method of praying those Scriptures that are really alive for you.
Now here is the rub.
As you proclaim, confess these Scriptures in prayer, some of your statements will not ring true in your heart.
Mark these.
Go back for another run, perhaps a number of runs and ask the Lord to bring you up to speed in those areas that you know need work.
This approach is not to keep you focused on your lack, but on God as your source.
He is the Potter.
You are the clay.
And as any clay working potter will tell you, they are intent on finishing the work of art they have started.
Come to grips with the fact that you are God's work of art created in Christ Jesus for good works (Ephesians 2:10) and that you, we, are not yet a finished work.
One of the ways to face this head-on is praying Scripture in first person singular.
This type of prayer is the fast track to truth and change.
Don't let discouragement win out!
Continue to pray Psalm 91 and continue to ask God to heal your unbelief or whatever else needs to be taken care of.
He cares.
He gets involved when invited.
Remember Jesus: "I stand at the door knocking..."
Yes, He is knocking, knocking...
Shalom, Jeanie R Psalm 91 is filled with many wonderful promises of protection- safety from hidden dangers, deadly diseases, terror (or terrorists), flying arrows (or bullets), pestilences, disasters, destruction (tornadoes, hurricanes, fires, car wrecks etc.)
It goes on to say, " A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you."
But, like other promises in the Bible, God's promises of protection are not automatic just because you are born again.
You must activate the promises in order to get them working in your life.
So how do you do that?
We'll look at a clue in Psalm 91.1, "He that lives in the shelter of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."
To abide means to continually spend time with God- worshipping Him, talking to Him, spending time in His Word and obeying Him.
If you have been been doing things you know are not pleasing to God, simply repent and ask God to help you live the way He wants you to.
Meditating on scriptures is an important part of spending time with God.
According to John 1:1, God and His Word are one.
Whatever scriptures you want to "activate" in your life are the ones you need to meditate on.
To meditate means to mutter, to speak, to ponder, to imagine, to talk, or to study.
To "activate" the protection offered in Psalm 91, start by reading the chapter out loud several times.
If possible, read it from several different Bible translations.
Also personalize it and think about what you are saying.
The way you personalize it is by saying "I" or "me" where appropriate and customizing it to fit your particular situation.
For example if you are dealing with cancer, instead of saying, "Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence," you might say, "Certainly God delivers me from cancer."
If you fear a terrorist attack, start declaring, "My family and I are protected.
No evil comes near me!"
Perhaps you are a parent or Sunday School teacher.
Speak the scriptures over your children as well or read them out loud and have the children repeat them after you.
This will get God's Word in them and help them learn these principles while they are young.
It may save their lives one day.
Keep saying the scriptures over and over, like you really mean it.
As you say them, imagine yourself experiencing the promises in your life and thank God that His Word is alive and powerful and it always works.
Do this daily as often as you need to, till all fear leaves and you are fully confident of God's protection over your life.
In order to keep fear out and your faith built up, read the scriptures at least once a day.
Click here to get your free printable, Psalm 91 Confession
Psalm 91 1 He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.
2 I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God, in him will I trust.
3 Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.
4 He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.
5 Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day;
6 Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.
7 A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.
8 Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.
9 Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation;
10 There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.
11 For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.
12 They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.
13 Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.
14 Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.
15 He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.
16 With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.
Join our mailing list A service plan for Lent from Psalm 91 focused on the protection we find in the loving care of God in a Lenten series of the Psalms
Theme of the Service
This is the fourth of these services, and this time of worship is formed by the message of Psalm 91.
The theme of this service is the secure protection that the child of God discovers in the loving care of God.
This care is represented by verse 4 of Psalm 91, "He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge..."
We are grateful for the collaborative efforts of two colleagues at Calvin Theological Seminary: Professor Carl Bosma, Associate Professor of Old Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary, for the sermon notes and Dr. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., the President of the Seminary, for his sermon on Psalm 91, "The Wings of God," which you will find following the liturgy.
* * * * *
WE GATHER IN WORSHIP
Prelude: "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" [see music notes]
The Call to Worship "Song of Praise: "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" PH 482:1-2 Psh 253:1-2 RL 145:1-2, RN 57:1-2, TH 53:1-2, TWC 77:1-2, UMH 139:1-2
*Our Declaration of Trust and God's Greeting: Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, who do you trust? Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth, Grace, mercy and peace to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!
* Response of Praise: "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" PH 482:3, Psh 253:3-4, RL 145:3-4, RN 57:3, 5, TH 53:3, 5, TWC 77:3, 4, UMH 139:3, 5
The Children's Moment
WE ARE RENEWED IN GRACE
The Call to Confession: Because we trust in God's covenant faithfulness, we are free to make our confession to God and call for his compassion.
Let us, therefore, confess our sins that we may be renewed in his grace.
The Prayer of Confession: O Master, great and awesome God, You never waiver in your covenant commitment, never give up on those who love you and do what you say.
Yet we have sinned in every way imaginable.
We've done evil things, rebelled, dodged and taken detours around your clearly marked paths.
Compassion is our only hope, the compassion of you, the Master, our God, since in our rebellion we've forfeited our rights.
Master, you are our God, for you delivered your people from the land of Egypt as such a show of power that people are still talking about it!
We confess that we have sinned, that we have lived bad lives.
Turn your ears our way, God, and listen.
Open your eyes and take a long look at us, your people named after you.
We know that we don't deserve a hearing from you.
Our appeal is to your compassion.
This prayer is our last and only hope: Master, listen to us!
Master, forgive us!
Through Christ, your Lamb, our Lord, Amen.
(adapted from Daniel 9 in The Message)
The Assurance of Pardon
The Gospel of Christ speaks to us of the pardon we may have through the finished work of Jesus Christ.
Please rise for the reading of the Gospel.
[The worshippers rise.]
The reading of John 10:11-18 This is the Gospel of Christ.
Thanks be to God.
On the basis of the Gospel of Christ, we may be assured that our sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ.
Passing the Peace
The Peace of Christ is with you.
(The worshippers greet each other saying, "The peace of Christ be with you.")
Our Great Affirmation: I believe that every thing God reveals in his Word is true.
I also believe that true faith is not only a knowledge and conviction.
It is also a deep-rooted assurance, created in me by the Holy Spirit through the gospel, that, out of sheer grace earned for by Christ, not only others, but I too, have had my sins forgiven, have been made forever right with God, and have been granted salvation.
(from the Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 21)
Song of Testimony: "When Peace Like a River" PSH 489:1, 3; TH 69:1, 3; TWC 51:9,1, 3; UMH 377:1, 3
God's Will for Grateful Living
GOD SPEAKS THROUGH HIS WORD
The Prayer for Illumination
The Scripture Reading: Psalm 91
The Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God!
Sermon: The Wings of God [Psalms for a Lenten Journey #4]
The Prayer of Application
WE RESPOND IN FAITH
"Song of Faith: "Children of the Heavenly Father" Psh 440:1-4, RL 585:1-4, TH 131:1-3, 5, TWC 84:1-4, UMH141:1-4 [see music notes]
The Prayers of the People
Anthem of Faith: "On Eagle's Wings", Wagner [see music notes] or Song of Faith: "On Eagle's Wings" RN112, SNC185, WOV779, UMH143
The Offertory
Our Offering of Music: "On Eagle's Wings" [see music notes]
Our Offering of Gifts for.....
WE LEAVE WITH GOD'S PEACE
*The Benediction with Congregational Amen!
*Song of Faith: "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" PH 376:1, 3, 4, Psh 568:1-3, RN 196:1-3, RL 464:1-3, TH 529:1, 3, 4, TWC 558:1, 3, 4, UMH 384:1, 3, 4 [see music notes]
Postlude: "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" [see music notes]
* You are invited to stand * * * * *
Sermon: "The Wings of God" by Dr. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.
Psalm 91:4 He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge.
Many adults can recall a certain childhood feeling that has now pretty much faded away.
When you are a child, you think like a child and feel like a child.
When you are an adult, you put away childish things.
Sorry to say, one of the things you put away is a childlike feeling of security in the nest.
It's a sense that you are protected and perfectly safe.
It's the sense that somebody else is in charge.
In properly functioning homes, children often have this feeling.
Adults do not, and they miss it.
Years ago, on the old Candid Camera TV program they interviewed a beefy truck driver who was about fifty.
They asked him what age he would be if he could be with age he wanted.
There was a silence for a while as the trucker thought it over.
When he spoke he said, "I would be the age of my father."
Was he hankering for age 65 and retirement so he could trade his Kenworth four-and-a-quarter semi tractor down to a John Deere riding lawnmower?
Or was he yearning for age 18 and the chance to go back and take some turn he had missed?
The trucker thought it over.
Suppose he could be any age he wanted.
Finally, he turned to the interviewer and said that if it was up to him he'd like to be three.
"Three? Why three?" the interviewer wanted to know.
"Well," said the trucker, "when you're three you don't have any responsibilities."
When I first heard the interview I thought the man was trying to be cute.
I now think he said something wiseful.
What he knew was that when you are a child, and if your family is running the right way, your burdens are usually small.
You can go to bed without worrying about ice backup under your shingles.
You don't wonder if the tingling in your leg might be a symptom of some exotic nerve disease.
You don't wrestle half the night with a tax deduction you claimed, wondering whether some federal person might find it a little too creative.
No, you squirm deliciously in your bed, comforted by the murmur of adult conversations elsewhere in the house.
You hover wonderfully at the edge of slumber.
Then you let go and fall away.
You dare to do this not only because you expect that in the morning you are going to be resurrected.
You also dare to do it because you are sleeping under your parents' wing.
If parents take proper care of you, you can give yourself up to sleep, because somebody else is in charge.
Somebody big and strong and experienced.
As far as a child knows, parents stay up all night, checking doors and windows, adjusting temperature controls, driving away marauders.
They never go off duty.
If a shadow falls over the house, or demons begin to stir, or a storm rises, parents will handle it.
That's one reason children sleep so well.
Their nest is sheltered and they love it, as they should.
I think children might be alarmed to discover how much adults crave this same sense of security.
Adults need to be sheltered too.
Some of us have been betrayed.
Some of us have grown old and are not happy about it.
People get betrayed, or they get old or sick.
Some are deeply disappointed and feel like a picture that all the Jewish and Christian generations have memorized and, in part because the phrase writes us to recover our childhood feeling of security in the nest.
Or, to discover it for the first time if we are working away from a terrorized childhood.
It's a special feeling and only a pretty numb Christian would fail to be touched by it.
Still, if you are thinking, one disturbing little question is pricking you.
How true is the picture of a sheltering God?
How secure are we in the nest?
I wonder whether in 1940 on the second Sunday of May some other Dutch family begged God to spread his wings over their house.
I wonder if the bombs of the German airforce pierced those wings and blew that house and its people to rubble.
You read Psalm 91, and you begin to wonder.
It offers such comprehensive coverage.
"He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge.
You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day, or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday."
Really? I need not fear any of these things? I can sleep in a dangerous neighborhood with my windows open? I shall not fear the terror of the night?
My child's temperature soars, and his white blood count falls: I shall not fear the pestilence that stalks in darkness?
I can plunge into my work at an AIDS clinic: I shall not fear the destruction that wastes at midnight?
Really? Is there a level of faith that can honestly say such things even after all allowances has been made for the fact that Psalm 91 is God's Word in poetry?
Let's face the truth.
Faith in the sheltering wings of God does not remove physical danger or the need for precaution against it.
We cannot ignore Middle East tourist advisories, or feed wild animals on our camping trips, or jump a hot motorcycle over a row of parked cars and trust God to keep us safe.
We cannot smoke cigarettes like the Marlboro man and then claim the promises of Psalm 91 as our protection against lung cancer.
A person who did these things would be a foolish believer and a foolish reader of Psalm 91.
You may recall that in Matthew's gospel Satan quotes the Psalm 91 to Jesus in the temptation at the pinnacle of the temple.
"Throw yourself down," says Satan.
After all, it says right in Psalm 91 that God will give his angels charge over you.
And Jesus replies that it is not right to put God to the test.
It seems that God's protection is good only for certain events may apply.
Jesus was teaching us that we cannot act like a fool and then count on God to bail us out.
God may do it—and some of us recall times we acted like fools, and God bailed us out.
But we cannot count on it.
And then, of course, some believers get hurt, terribly hurt, by no fault of their own.
Suppose a drunk driver smashes into your family car.
Suppose an I-beam falls in on you in a storm.
Or suppose you are a devout middle-aged Christian woman who lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan.
One August you start not to feel very well.
So you visit your primary care physician, who sends you for tests, and then a visit to a specialist, and then more tests.
Finally you go back to your own physician, and he says "Ma'am, I'm sorry to say that you had better get your affairs in order."
He says more, far more, about treatments and research and making you as comfortable as possible—and on with all kinds of stuff that is well-meant.
But you have grown deaf.
All you can think is that you are forty-six years old, and you are going to die before your parents do and before you have any grandchildren.
Whatever happened to the wings of God?
Can you get brain cancer under those wings?
Get molested by a family member?
Get knifed by some emotionless teenager in a subway in New York?
Can you find, suddenly one summer, that your own seventeen-year-old has become a stranger and that everything in your family seems to be cascading out of control?
Where are those wings?
I think that what troubles us is not so much the sheer fact that believers suffer along with everybody else.
C.S. Lewis once pondered this.
If the children of God were always saved from floods like believing Noah and his family; if every time somebody pointed a gun at a Christian, the gun just turned to salami; if we really had a money-back guarantee against hatred, disease, and the acts of terrorists, then of course we wouldn't have to worry about church growth.
Our churches would fill with people attracted to the faith for its benefit plan.
These are people who want an insurance agent, not a church.
For security they want Arnold Schwarzenegger, not God.
We already have people becoming Christians because they want to get rich or get happy.
What would happen to people's integrity if becoming a believer really did give you blanket protection against poverty, accidents, and the wages of sin?
No, it's not the fact that their lives have not turned out as they had hoped.
Others have been staggered by a report that has just come back from a pathology lab.
Still others are unspeakably injured by people they treasure.
Some are simply high-tension human beings, strung tight as piano wire.
To all such folk the psalmist speaks a word of comfort.
It's one of the great themes of the Scriptures: God is our shelter.
He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge.
The image here is that of an eagle, or maybe a heron—in any case it's a picture of a bird that senses danger and then protectively spreads its wings over its young.
An expert on birds once told me that this move is very common.
A bird senses the approach of a predator, or the threat of something falling from above, and instinctively spreads out its wings like a canopy.
Then the fledglings scuttle underneath for shelter.
The move is so instinctive that an adult bird will spread those wings even when no fledglings are around!
And the Psalmist—who has almost surely seen this lovely thing happen—the Psalmist thinks of God.
He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge.
The point is that God is our shelter when the winds begin to howl.
The point is that under God's wings we are defended, protected, perfectly safe.
The point is that someone else is in charge.
Someone big, strong, and experienced.
Someone who never goes off duty.
In one of his books John Timmer tells of his experience as a boy in the Netherlands at the start of World War II.
German troops had invaded Holland a few days before, but nobody knew just what to expect.
Then, on the second Sunday of May, 1940, as the Timmer family was sitting around the dinner table in their home in Haarlem, suddenly they heard the air-raid siren and then the droning of German bombers.
Of course, everybody was scared out of their minds.
"Let's go stand in the hallway," John's father said.
"Here it's the safest place in the house."
In the hall John's father said, "Why don't we pray? There's nothing else we can do."
John Timmer writes he has long ago forgotten the exact wording of his father's prayer—but except for one phrase.
Somewhere in that prayer, Mr. Timmer, who was praying God to protect his family from Hitler's Luftwaffe—somewhere in that prayer he said, "O God, in the shadow of your wings we take refuge."
It's a picture—God spreading his wings over us—and it's a picture that all the Jewish and Christian generations have memorized and, in part because the phrase writes us to recover our childhood feeling of security in the nest.
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The move is so instinctive that an adult bird will spread those wings even when no fledglings are around!
And the Psalmist—who has almost surely seen this lovely thing happen—the Psalmist thinks of God.
He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge.
The point is that God is our shelter when the winds begin to howl.
The point is that under God's wings we are defended, protected, perfectly safe.
The point is that someone else is in charge.
Someone big, strong, and experienced.
Someone who never goes off duty.
In one of his books John Timmer tells of his experience as a boy in the Netherlands at the start of World War II.
German troops had invaded Holland a few days before, but nobody knew just what to expect.
Then, on the second Sunday of May, 1940, as the Timmer family was sitting around the dinner table in their home in Haarlem, suddenly they heard the air-raid siren and then the droning of German bombers.
Of course, everybody was scared out of their minds.
"Let's go stand in the hallway," John's father said.
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In the hall John's father said, "Why don't we pray? There's nothing else we can do."
John Timmer writes he has long ago forgotten the exact wording of his father's prayer—but except for one phrase.
Somewhere in that prayer, Mr. Timmer, who was praying God to protect his family from Hitler's Luftwaffe—somewhere in that prayer he said, "O God, in the shadow of your wings we take refuge."
It's a picture—God spreading his wings over us—and it's a picture that all the Jewish and Christian generations have memorized and, in part because the phrase writes us to recover our childhood feeling of security in the nest.
Or, to discover it for the first time if we are working away from a terrorized childhood.
It's a special feeling and only a pretty numb Christian would fail to be touched by it.
Still, if you are thinking, one disturbing little question is pricking you.
How true is the picture of a sheltering God?
How secure are we in the nest?
I wonder whether in 1940 on the second Sunday of May some other Dutch family begged God to spread his wings over their house.
I wonder if the bombs of the German airforce pierced those wings and blew that house and its people to rubble.
You read Psalm 91, and you begin to wonder.
It offers such comprehensive coverage.
"He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge.
You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day, or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday."
Really? I need not fear any of these things? I can sleep in a dangerous neighborhood with my windows open? I shall not fear the terror of the night?
My child's temperature soars, and his white blood count falls: I shall not fear the pestilence that stalks in darkness?
I can plunge into my work at an AIDS clinic: I shall not fear the destruction that wastes at midnight?
Really? Is there a level of faith that can honestly say such things even after all allowances has been made for the fact that Psalm 91 is God's Word in poetry?
Let's face the truth.
Faith in the sheltering wings of God does not remove physical danger or the need for precaution against it.
We cannot ignore Middle East tourist advisories, or feed wild animals on our camping trips, or jump a hot motorcycle over a row of parked cars and trust God to keep us safe.
We cannot smoke cigarettes like the Marlboro man and then claim the promises of Psalm 91 as our protection against lung cancer.
A person who did these things would be a foolish believer and a foolish reader of Psalm 91.
You may recall that in Matthew's gospel Satan quotes the Psalm 91 to Jesus in the temptation at the pinnacle of the temple.
"Throw yourself down," says Satan.
After all, it says right in Psalm 91 that God will give his angels charge over you.
And Jesus replies that it is not right to put God to the test.
It seems that God's protection is good only for certain events may apply.
Jesus was teaching us that we cannot act like a fool and then count on God to bail us out.
God may do it—and some of us recall times we acted like fools, and God bailed us out.
But we cannot count on it.
And then, of course, some believers get hurt, terribly hurt, by no fault of their own.
Suppose a drunk driver smashes into your family car.
Suppose an I-beam falls in on you in a storm.
Or suppose you are a devout middle-aged Christian woman who lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan.
One August you start not to feel very well.
So you visit your primary care physician, who sends you for tests, and then a visit to a specialist, and then more tests.
Finally you go back to your own physician, and he says "Ma'am, I'm sorry to say that you had better get your affairs in order."
He says more, far more, about treatments and research and making you as comfortable as possible—and on with all kinds of stuff that is well-meant.
But you have grown deaf.
All you can think is that you are forty-six years old, and you are going to die before your parents do and before you have any grandchildren.
Whatever happened to the wings of God?
Can you get brain cancer under those wings?
Get molested by a family member?
Get knifed by some emotionless teenager in a subway in New York?
Can you find, suddenly one summer, that your own seventeen-year-old has become a stranger and that everything in your family seems to be cascading out of control?
Where are those wings?
I think that what troubles us is not so much the sheer fact that believers suffer along with everybody else.
C.S. Lewis once pondered this.
If the children of God were always saved from floods like believing Noah and his family; if every time somebody pointed a gun at a Christian, the gun just turned to salami; if we really had a money-back guarantee against hatred, disease, and the acts of terrorists, then of course we wouldn't have to worry about church growth.
Our churches would fill with people attracted to the faith for its benefit plan.
These are people who want an insurance agent, not a church.
For security they want Arnold Schwarzenegger, not God.
We already have people becoming Christians because they want to get rich or get happy.
What would happen to people's integrity if becoming a believer really did give you blanket protection against poverty, accidents, and the wages of sin?
No, it's not the fact that their lives have not turned out as they had hoped.
Others have been staggered by a report that has just come back from a pathology lab.
Still others are unspeakably injured by people they treasure.
Some are simply high-tension human beings, strung tight as piano wire.
To all such folk the psalmist speaks a word of comfort.
It's one of the great themes of the Scriptures: God is our shelter.
He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge.
The image here is that of an eagle, or maybe a heron—in any case it's a picture of a bird that senses danger and then protectively spreads its wings over its young.
An expert on birds once told me that this move is very common.
A bird senses the approach of a predator, or the threat of something falling from above, and instinctively spreads out its wings like a canopy.
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