



President Walton's August 2020 Message

Even Now, Trust in Jesus



Last year, when I was planning themes for the year ahead, August was to be a time of looking forward to new opportunities with a new outlook. In my mind's eye I saw schools starting up again, people beginning to get back into familiar routines of life and excitement for the start of the new cycle of life that begins after summer. All of that got side-railed in March when life as we once knew it took a turn. The COVID-19 virus has impacted virtually every area of modern life, from the way we shop, work, worship, and even the way we dress!

Many are wondering when things will return to normal. The truth is, not only do we not know when things will return to “normal,” but we aren't quite sure what the new normal will even look like. We pray for a cure to be discovered, a vaccine to be found, no more news reports on the rise of this disease, and no more deaths. I have found that if I watch too much news I can get discouraged, especially as I consider my final year as District President. As I've shared with staff, when I am feeling that way, I turn to the Psalms, and there I find words of comfort.

One of my favorites, which also happened to be a favorite of none other than Martin Luther, is Psalm 130. It captures how many are feeling. The Psalmist writes, ***“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy!”*** How easy it would be to think God is unaware of our needs and concerns. He hears the collective pleas of His people, and, as always, we can be confident that He is working out His plan in our midst, even if we don't understand or agree with it. He hears our prayers even though we have no right to approach Him, except through Jesus!

The Psalmist continues, ***“If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.”*** Like the Psalmist, when we stop and recognize our sinfulness, and how our sin contributes to all the disease in our world, we know we cannot stand before our Holy God. Perhaps we did not cause this pandemic virus, but how often have our tongues perpetuated the virus of gossip or slander? Haven't we breathed out the anger of wrath towards others, or stood in judgment of another? Have we not murdered others with our thoughts or been guilty of worshipping all kinds of idols? If we are honest with ourselves we know that we, sinful as we are, cannot stand in the presence of a Holy God. And yet, the Psalmist knew, and reminds each of us, that the chief thing God does is forgive sinners! In fact, He went as far as sending His own Son to bear the burden of our sin on the Cross. If God would go to this length to wipe out our sin, never doubt that He hears your pleas, please!

You may have heard the incredible story of faith of Horatio Spafford, who lived in the 1800's. He was a successful, prosperous and prominent Chicago lawyer. He was also a devout Christian who was immersed in Scripture. He had a wonderful life. He was wealthy and owned several properties throughout the city of Chicago. He and his beloved wife had four beautiful daughters and one son. Life was more than good – it was blessed with joy! He would learn how adversity is not spared from people of faith.

Just as Horatio hit the pinnacle of his profession and financial success, things began to quickly change. His life began to unravel with the tragic loss of their son. Not long thereafter, the Great Chicago Fire destroyed nearly every real estate investment Horatio owned.

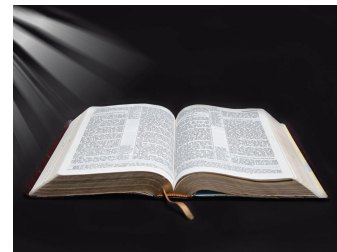
A few years later in 1873, Spafford decided to treat his wife and daughters to a much-needed escape from the turmoil they had endured, and he sent them on a boat trip to Europe. He had planned to join them shortly after wrapping up some business in Chicago. Just a few days after they had set sail, he received a dreadful telegram from his wife, "Saved alone..." It bore the excruciating news the ship the family had sailed on had wrecked and all four of his daughters had perished.

As Spafford was on his way to meet his heartbroken wife, passing over the same sea that had just claimed the lives of his remaining children, God spoke to his troubled heart, and he recalled God's promises, even in the face of turmoil. It was then he put his pen to paper and the timeless hymn was born, beginning with the words:

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

Famous hymn composer, Philip Bliss, a contemporary of Spafford's, was so moved by the story and the prose Spafford wrote, he composed the tune we have all heard. God has used this hymn to bring comfort to countless thousands throughout the years. Only later would people learn of the tragedy he endured. When you consider the losses this man experienced, it is amazing to imagine this encouraging and uplifting hymn came from the depths of such unimaginable discouragement and sorrow. His faith is inspiring, and certainly a byproduct of the Spirit of God working through His Word. May it be, for us, a reminder of how God can overcome even the darkest times of our earthly life as we put our trust in Jesus.

I don't know how this virus has impacted your family, your church, your community, or just you. I'm certain it has in some way. Trust in Jesus. He's already given His life for you to show you the depths of His love. Such trust doesn't eliminate the trials in our lives, but reminds us how Jesus can turn our trials into gold! (1 Peter 1:7). Every step along the way our Savior continues to promise that He is with us always and will never leave us nor forsake us! This is the trust the Psalmist had in God.



The Psalmist concludes this beautiful testimony like this: ***"I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with Him is plentiful redemption. And He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities."*** This is why Luther loved this Psalm. It has a great balance of Law and Gospel!

God continues to speak to restless people in this Psalm. Wait on the Lord! Put your hope in Him. Trust Him, even in the midst of a pandemic; even when you don't know what tomorrow will bring. Not only is He the Lord of the Church, but He is also Lord of our lives who knows every hair on our heads, and every anxious thought on our hearts. And He still loves us!

We can continue to cry out of the depths, knowing our gracious God hears us for the sake of Jesus, loves us more than we can fathom, and has a plan for our lives. The Psalmist wrote

in Psalm 139, “*All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be...*” God is at work in the midst of our trials. He is more powerful than any virus, and He has a better plan ahead than the one I had crafted! So our trust remains in Jesus as we look to the future; a future fixed on Jesus! Amen?

With you on the journey,

Greg



**ONE BODY
MANY PARTS**

floridageorgia district
President's Equip Conference
September 24-26, 2020 Orlando, FL

The President's Equip Conference for all church workers AND laity, offering practical, strategic resources for congregations to learn and grow, will be held September 24-26, 2020. The theme is "One Body, Many Parts," from 1 Corinthians 12, and we desire to bring together the whole family of God in the Florida-Georgia District. In addition to useful workshops, we will have

David Kinnaman, CEO of the Barna Research Group, **Donna Snow**, and for entertainment, **The Skit Guys**. More information can be found through our website - <https://flgadistrict.org/pec/>

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Reaching Many in 2020
for Jesus!