

Why?

(A devotion for the Christian who is under great, long-lasting stress)

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. Psalm 42:1

My heart is in pain and cries out for help. I know God has everything planned out and under his control. I know he has promised me that he will care for me, provide for me, never give me more than I can handle. I even know he loves me. I do believe his promises and can quote Scripture passages tucked away in my memory that reassure me of these truths. But then, why do I feel so distressed? Why do people seem to annoy me so? Why do I feel as if I just can't make any progress? Why do I feel so unappreciated when I work so very hard to please? Why do I feel so alone? Why can't I just get a break now and then?

I just want to sit in a corner and weep – no, not weep, but cry great big tears! But I'm God's child. He calls me by name. He cares about me. He knows how I feel without my shedding even one tear. He doesn't leave me alone! These are the days when the Holy Spirit hears my moans, and through the Word, he begins to guide my thoughts.

He tells me about Elijah who sat under a broom tree, quit eating, and asked God to just end his life. Elijah had just witnessed an amazing display of God's power and sovereignty, but he allowed Satan to totally distract him with the real fear that Jezebel wanted to take his life. Then Satan kicked him while he was down with thoughts of isolation which made him feel as if there was no one in the whole world who cared.

What was God's remedy? Get up, eat, and get to work! God didn't come to Elijah in almighty power, but in a gentle whisper, with mercy and compassion and yet with a firmness that made Elijah see the world as a humble servant committed to doing God's will. Maybe I should read 1 Kings 19 again and see how these verses might apply to me right now. Maybe I should listen for that gentle whisper.

Who is the Jezebel in my life? Is it someone in particular who just always seems to criticize, discourage, attack, gossip? Is it a situation that seems to take on a life of its own as it grows and overshadows everything I do? Is it something of my own making where I can't seem to live up to my own expectations? Is it my own insecurities or fears, real or imagined? Jezebel takes on many different forms, but they are all Satan in disguise, getting me to take my eyes off Jesus and the purpose he has given me in life.

In 2 Corinthians 12, I read about Paul repeatedly begging that God would remove the thorn from his flesh. To Paul it was huge and sapped the joy out of every day. It just wouldn't go away. If only that thorn was gone he knew he could do his ministry so much better. Let me see, why was that thorn there in the first place? It was to keep Paul from being conceited, to make Paul realize that God's grace provides all that is needed to accomplish God's plan for him in this world.

What's my thorn? Do I feel as if I am so gifted that I'm irreplaceable? Do I feel that I know best and others just don't get it? Do I try to be so perfect that I can never, ever be criticized? Do I focus on me and what people think of me instead of on humble service to God's glory? Do I try too hard on the wrong things or try with a tainted attitude? On any given day I'm probably guilty of all of these things. Yet once again, God knows these things about me and reassures me that when I lean on him, my work and my life are acceptable to him. For when I am weak, then I am strong. I'm strong because God has me in his hand!

In is times like these the Spirit reminds me of Psalm 42 and I ask God to make my soul pant after him like a thirsty deer in the forest. What a picture! What a singular focus! How refreshing as that first gulp removes the intense thirst. Let my thirst for God, the hope and confidence he gives me, thunder louder than anything Satan has to offer.

I know the same situations will be here in the morning. However, my attitude can be different. My focus can be different. My confidence won't be in me, but in God. My attitude will be one of submission to God, his chastening and his will. My God wipes away the tears and lets me shout with joy and thanksgiving in the most desperate of situations.

Prayer:

Lord, lead me. Give me wisdom, give me patience. Set my priorities and change my heart. Remind me daily that when I am weak then I am strong. Amen.

For Further Reading:
Psalm 71:12, Psalm 118:24

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