

God, Get Me Through

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Chapter 1 God in Your Room

The crowded pages of my passport serve as proof that I have often endured the long flight between America and Africa. With a layover in Europe, it can take up to 30 hours. But as I reflect now on all those journeys, they seem like leisurely strolls to the local grocery store compared to the last flight our family took out of Kenya.

Months before our departure date, we began the process of selling off or giving away ten years' worth of kitchenware, appliances, furniture and clothing. As the process wore on, our eager anticipation of leaving and facing new opportunities was counterbalanced by increased fatigue in Lyn, my wife. Her body called for rest instead of work, and two weeks before we got on the airplane, Lyn was in the hospital in Nairobi.

Our doctor was hesitant to permit the trip, but he knew we needed expert help to supply an explanation for Lyn's persistent weakness. At the airport, our friends gathered around Lyn as she sat in the wheelchair, a scarf covering her face to shield her from germs. Someone clicked a picture of our group. There were forced smiles on most of our faces, but our hearts were grieved and not a little worried over the grueling journey ahead and the medical mysteries that remained unsolved.

An uninvited guest, an intruder, had entered our lives. Calamity had come to our home and discovered a way to sneak in through the back door. My wife was very ill. My partner in adventure, who willingly went to a continent she feared, who stood strong during troubling headlines of embassy bombings and student riots, who nursed our daughters through sweat-filled nights, who waved me goodbye when I left for a trip and hugged me hello when I returned – my mate was now

weak, unable to support her own head as we waited and waited for the signal to board the plane.

I felt observed and inspected. *What's wrong with that lady? Does she have AIDS? Is she contagious?*

But mainly I felt confused and alone. *How sick is Lyn? What does the future hold? How can we possibly make it through these long flights?*

I'm certainly no authority on suffering. In fact, several months before Lyn became ill I was asked to preach on the subject of suffering and I frankly struggled to put together a string of ideas worth calling a sermon. And I'm surely not an expert on your trial or whatever it is that draws you to this book. But this I have come to believe as I reflect back over the difficult pilgrimage that began that night at the airport: God is right in the thick of the struggle. Not aloof. Not a distant observer. When trial comes, God rolls up His sleeves for work, takes your trembling hands in His calming ones, and spends every agonizing moment giving you His full concern.

The song God wrote for you

This is not a matter of speculation on my part. I'm not perpetuating myth or wishing upon an imaginary star. I'm citing the Book of books, quoting the God who never lies.

One day many centuries ago, God was in a writing mood. The mood struck Him, I believe, because He had a longing in His heart to express something to each and every one of His children who would pass through troubled waters. If this were not the case, we'd never have lyrics as comforting as Psalm 139.

David, the man whom God chose to use as His writing implement for this psalm, brought a fascinating blend of qualities to his task. As a king, he could speak of anger and hatred and enemies. As a musician, he could appreciate the artistry of God in weaving and forming and writing. As a man, he knew the crushing guilt of personal sin and the haunting loss of a beloved child. And as one who grew up shepherding his father's sheep, David knew how to lie in the grass and count God's thoughts till he ran out of numbers.

Through the song of David, God has expressed to us a love more intimate than we can imagine.

O LORD, Thou hast searched me and known me.
Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up;
Thou dost understand my thought from afar.
Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down,
And art intimately acquainted with all my ways.
Even before there is a word on my tongue,
Behold, O LORD, Thou dost know it all.
Thou hast enclosed me behind and before,
And laid Thy hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
It is too high, I cannot attain to it.
(Psalm 139:1-6 emphasis added)

I don't know specifically what valley you are passing through. Perhaps you've been asked to face the Goliath of a dreaded disease. Or your challenge may be a financial crisis, a moral fall-out, a family disappointment, or any number of other unwelcome surprises. But whatever the particular details of your season of suffering, God wants you to know that He is there, right where you are, "intimately acquainted" with each and every agonizing moment.

Even before you get a chance to whisper a desperate prayer, God already knows precisely what you need as well as the fears that make you feel that need so deeply.

Not only that, but your caring God has "enclosed" you "behind and before." Everything that is *behind* you – all you've already been through in the past – God hasn't forgotten one bit of it. He was there and He remembers it all. Everything that is *before* you – each and every event that you are still going to experience in the future – God already knows what is ahead for you. He won't be surprised by anything. He is anticipating it, and will walk through each step with you. God's not afraid of your future.

Behind and before. From your earliest problem to your final challenge, God is already there ahead of you. His love and power are more than adequate to meet the need.

No wonder David laid down his quill pen and rubbed his forehead, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it."

Visitation at Gatwick

As I reflect on our long journey out of Kenya, I've drawn the same conclusion.

The eight hour flight from Nairobi to London's Gatwick airport brought Lyn to the point of total exhaustion and seemingly to death's door itself. She groaned in the painful agony of weakness. I interrogated myself, wishing I could have spared her this impossible trip but knowing we had to get her the treatment she needed. Lauren and Heather, our two teenage daughters, worried for their mother, wondering what the future held.

We finally arrived at Gatwick, and I asked the airline personnel to drive us to the ticket counter. We were scheduled to lay over for twelve hours before our ongoing flight to San Francisco, but I knew we needed to delay our departure to give Lyn a chance to recuperate from the grueling flight we had just endured. We changed our ticket to give ourselves an additional 24 hours to rest, and checked into a hotel adjacent to the airport. We found our room, and Lyn collapsed into bed.

God knew all that we had been through. And He knew what we didn't know – that we had only seen the tip of the iceberg. So the God of grace, who enclosed us behind and before, gave us a reminder of His intimate presence there in that lonely room.

Some would call it a near-death experience, and perhaps it was. During the night, as the four of us tried rather unsuccessfully to get some rest, Lyn saw a heavenly doorway, beaming with warm light. Now you need to know that my wife was not one who frequently searched for, nor experienced dreams or visions. She was matter-of-fact and rested her faith on the rock-solid revelation of God's Word, the Bible. But she believed that God did something very special that night.

As Lyn approached that visionary threshold, she had an overwhelming sense of safety – that if she were to pass through that doorway into the presence of God she would experience the most wonderful comfort imaginable. In fact, she reported to us in the morning that she would gladly have moved into that safe light had God chosen to invite her in.

The result of that dream has proven very significant. More than ever, Lyn did not fear death after that. She knew that when God called her to her heavenly home it would not be an experience to fear but to long for.

God is there, and He is good. And everything that truly matters is safely stored away in the eternal storehouse of your relationship with Jesus Christ. We can

publicize the words of the shepherd-king, “such knowledge is too wonderful.”
God’s intimate understanding of where we are and what we need is truly fantastic!

I say this, even now that I know that the plane ride from Kenya was only the first of several difficult journeys, for we were yet to travel

- Through an operating room and in ambulances
- Through unanswered prayers and an unwelcome diagnosis
- Through torturous treatments and surprise setbacks.

After all we have been through, and in light of all the unknowns that still faced us, I affirm that God knows you and me intimately. No one knows you better than your God.

And so, my hope today is to interject the reality of God’s loving comfort into your life. If you’re groping in confusion, I want to establish a light of truth to guide you. If you’re paralyzed by fear, I want to hammer a stake of faith into the ground. And if you’re reeling under the weight of bad news, I want to place you in the loving hands that won’t let you fall.

“No matter what”

I want to do all that by telling you very bluntly, God knows exactly where you are right now. He does hospital rooms and divorce courts. He paces hallways and kneels at bedsides. He rides in ambulances and hunkers down in lonely dorm rooms. You name it, God has been there, because He is intimately acquainted with all the ways of His children.

Dear friend, no one knows you better than God. And the amazing thing is that, even though God knows all your faults, there is no one who loves you more than He does.

That leads us to a vital question: Will you trust Him? Believing that He knows where you are and what you’re going through, will you trust God to get you through?

At this point, I can hear my wife Lyn talking over my shoulder. “No matter what,” she says. I reply, “What do you mean, ‘No matter what’?”

“Say it’s important to trust God *no matter what.*”

That's what God showed her in the hotel at Gatwick...that God can be trusted no matter what. Even if He allows death, even if He doesn't heal, God is still worthy of our trust.

In the face of death, Lyn found Scripture to be true, "even in death the righteous have a refuge." (Proverbs 14:32 NIV) I wonder. Even if the downward trend isn't reversed, even if the outlook continues to be negative, will you and I still trust God?

Do you remember the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego being thrown into the fiery furnace of King Nebuchadnezzar? The king issued his threat that if they did not bow down and worship his golden image that they would be tossed into the incinerator. Their reply was enough to stir the faith of all of us, "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king." (Daniel 3:17)

Trust God. He is able. He will deliver!

But now comes the hard part, the "no matter what" part. The three men continued, "But *even if He does not*, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." (Daniel 3:18 emphasis added)

Here's why I make this point. Whether your problem is solved or not, He's there. Whether the diagnosis improves or doesn't, God cares. He holds your hand no matter what, so you can rest in Him...no matter what.

PRAYER

God, I thank You for being here with me right now.
Thank You that You know exactly what I'm going through.
I ask that You would remind me today of Your presence.
Let me experience Your strong hand.
Help me, Lord, to trust You to do with me what is best.
No matter what happens, I want to depend on you completely.
Amen