

W A Y W A R D  
C H I L D R E N

FINDING  
PEACE,  
KEEPING  
HOPE

STUART W. SCOTT



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## How to Nourish Your Soul

*A LITTLE BIT every day* can do great good for your soul.

I read the Bible to my kids during breakfast. I don't read a lot. Maybe just a few verses. But I work hard to do it every weekday.

My wife and I pray for one of our children, a different child each night, before we go to bed. We usually take just a few minutes. We don't pray lengthy, expansive prayers. But we try to do this most every night.

Although they don't take long, these practices are edifying, hopeful, and effective.

This devotional is just the same. Each entry is short. Just a few tasty morsels of Scripture to nourish your hungry soul. Read it on the subway or the bus on the way to work. Read it with a friend or a spouse every night at dinner. Make it a part of each day for thirty-one days, and it will do you great good.

Why is that?

*We start with Scripture.* God's Word is powerful. Used by the Holy Spirit, it turns the hearts of kings, brings comfort to the lowly, and gives spiritual sight to the blind. It transforms lives and turns them upside down. We know that the Bible is God's very own words, so we read and study it to know God himself.

*Our study of Scripture is practical.* Theology should change how we live. It's crucial to connect the Word with your struggles. Often, as you read this devotional, you'll see the word *you* because Stuart speaks directly to you, the reader. Each reading contains at least one reflection question and practical suggestion. You'll get much more from this experience if you answer the questions and do the practical exercises. Don't skip them. Do them for the sake of your own soul.

*Our study of Scripture is worshipful.* It breaks our hearts when our children walk away from the faith, discarding years of biblical teaching and Christlike modeling at home and in the church. What should we do? Turn back to Christ. Cling to him. Beg him for mercy for us and our children. The temptation to put our hope anywhere other than Jesus is strong: “What if my child comes to church? What if my child starts to study the Bible with me?” While these are good things, we need to be careful. We must not put our hope in a change of circumstances but in God himself. We must turn to the Word. It can help us see God is bigger than any painful circumstance. We see in the Word the answers for our confusion, hurt, pain, anxieties, anger, and so much more. The Word can restore our worship.

If you find this devotional helpful (and I trust that you will!), reread it in different seasons of your life. Work through it this coming month, then come back to it a year from now to remind yourself that our hope for change must ultimately be in Christ.

If, after reading and rereading Stuart’s devotional, you want more gospel-rich resources, he has listed several at the end of the book. Buy them and make good use of them.

Are you ready? Let’s begin.

Deepak Reju

## Introduction

SINCE YOU HAVE picked up this book, I assume that you or someone close to you needs encouragement and wisdom from above. If you are scratching your head, wondering what went wrong, remember that even God reared children who rebelled and went their own way (see Isa. 1:2). The best thing you can do when trouble begins is to live in the awareness that you yourself are the Perfect Father's child. You are in need of your Father, his wisdom, and his guidance each moment. You may already have become *painfully* aware of this fact in your parenting journey.

If God has allowed you to experience an ongoing trial with your child, know that however bad it may be, it is also *good*. It is good because God is doing something *for* you, not to you. Through these circumstances, God intends to reveal himself to you and to accomplish much for you, your parenting, your child, and his glory. Whether your son or daughter is making some poor decisions or actively rebelling through a spiritually bankrupt life, our Lord and Savior is greater than these challenges (see Ps. 147:5). He can see you through as a parent. He can bring beauty from ashes, even if you have parental regrets (see Isa. 61:3).

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for young people to depart from the faith they have grown up around and perhaps even professed to believe. If you are the parent of a wayward child, you are not alone, even though it may sometimes feel like it. Obviously, the Lord is with you (see Heb. 13:5–6). But I too have been where you are, and I still am as of this writing. For some twenty years, God has been good to me and refined me in this circumstance. He, “the Father of mercies and God of all comfort” (2 Cor. 1:3), has given me and my wife, Zondra, many opportunities “to

comfort those who are in [this] affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (v. 4).

In my prayer journal, I have eight pages of names of parents and their wayward children whom I regularly pray for. The number keeps growing as I come across more parents with this need while speaking and counseling. The Lord has gloriously resolved a number of bleak situations.

Many others are in your situation, and your heavenly Father has not abandoned them or you. Nor has he given you more than you can handle by his grace (see 2 Cor. 12:7–10). The following is a month’s worth of daily devotions that should offer you encouragement, biblical direction, and profitable examination.

Though the readings for each day are short, bear in mind that the truths offered are not platitudes. Each day’s reading begins with a main verse or two for the topic at hand. But each reading also includes other verse references that support the main point. Looking up all the references will make each devotional more meaningful and powerful. If you do not have the time on a particular day, you can always revisit the devotion later or even do a second or third round of the thirty-one days to get the most out of them. May God bless you on this journey.



TURN TO THE LORD  
FOR STRENGTH AND  
HOPE



## DAY 1

# Trusting God in the Dark Times

*The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. (Deut. 32:4)*

IN VERY DIFFICULT times, we learn what we really believe. When we are hurting, we must fall back on who God is and cling to his Word. He is “good and do[es] good” (Ps. 119:68). He is perfect in all his ways (see Ps. 18:30). He has not failed us, nor is he indifferent to our pain or the plight of our children (see Isa. 61:1–3; 63:9). He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-wise (see Ps. 139:1–24; Jer. 10:12; 32:27). And “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). Our verse for today is a good summation of these truths.

You may be learning that your children are some of the most difficult of God’s gifts to place *fully* in his hands. To agree with God’s timing or decision concerning the salvation of our children is a matter of raw faith and the ultimate test of our trust and submission. Heartfelt questions posed to God are not always wrong. But be careful *how* you question God during this time. “Why, God?” can be either a painful cry for understanding and faith or an angry judgment of God’s work in your circumstances. The latter will get you nowhere, nor does God deserve it.

Difficult parenting years are a special time for us to learn to trust the Lord more. Real trust means we are willing to accept calamity as well as good through the filtering hand of God. Think of Job, who suddenly lost everything dear to him. His astounding reaction to this extreme trial was to worship God rather than judge him: “Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The

LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.' In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong" (Job 1:20–22).

Habakkuk the prophet expressed this same attitude when he said, "Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places" (Hab. 3:17–19).

Later, Job *did* waver in his trust. And you may waver too. But you *must*—and God will help you—return to trust as Job did (see Job 42:1–6). It is the kind of love and trust an all-wise and good God deserves.

**Reflect:** One of our greatest challenges is to place our children *fully* in God's hands. And yet we forfeit so much until we agree with God's plan and trust his faithfulness (see Eccl. 7:13–14).

**Reflect:** Ask yourself, "How might the Lord be growing me in my faith through this circumstance?"

**Act:** This is a critical time in your life for you to study the character of God. Make a plan for how you can study and rehearse his attributes.

## DAY 2

# Drawing Near to God

*Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. (James 4:8)*

WHAT A PRECIOUS promise we have from God in James 4! Think for a minute about the far-reaching implications of the nearness of God in our lives—specifically for us as parents (see Isa. 40:9–31; Eph. 1:19; Phil. 4:13). We can go to God when we are perplexed and hurting, or even sinning, to “pour out [our hearts] before him” (Ps. 62:8) and to make our requests known (see Phil. 4:6). Scripture tells us, “Trust in him at all times, O people; . . . God is a refuge for us” (Ps. 62:8).

Ephesians 2:13 teaches us that, through Christ, God himself is already near his own: “Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” But as *you* draw near, you will find him effectively nearer because you will see him better. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea” (Ps. 46:1–2).

For those who are saved by God’s grace alone through their faith in Christ, he is always there. So it is not that we must somehow move God near to us, nor do we need to wonder, “Where are you, God, in all this?” Rather, we should press into him as we humbly pray, read his Word, submit our wills to his (see Ps. 145:18), and confess our sin (see James 4:5–10).

Your only hope in this, or any, circumstance is God. Drawing near to the Lord Jesus is the only possible way to “not be anxious about anything” (Phil. 4:6). You can go to Christ and cast “all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). He knows every tear you have shed (see Pss. 34:15; 56:8). He is near

to the brokenhearted, and he acts on behalf of the humble (see Ps. 34:18; James 4:8–10).

Stop worrying, stop questioning, and instead draw near to God for the help, strength, and wisdom you need—it is the very best thing you can do: “For me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works” (Ps. 73:28).

**Reflect:** What is your response when you receive bad news or when fear or grief begins to overwhelm you? Do you straight-away move into action mode in your own way or strength? Do you become angry or withdraw from the Lord? Do you numb yourself with a false refuge, only distancing yourself (in a sense) from him? Or do you draw near?

**Reflect:** How could this circumstance work for good in your relationship with God?

**Act:** Choose a specific time when you can pull away from earthly concerns to pour out your heart and draw near to the Lord through his Word, in prayer, and with needed confessions. In that time, commit to draw near to God whenever things are painful or confusing.

**Act:** Thank God often that he *is* near through Christ’s blood alone. And after you draw near, rise up to faith in who he is.

## DAY 3

# Where Hope and Joy Must Be

*Why are you cast [utterly] down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. (Ps. 42:5–6)*

OUR HOPE IS whatever we depend on or set our hearts on as our absolute “must have” (see Ps. 73:25–26). Our real hope and joy must be in God alone—in who he is, in his sacrifice for us, and in his promises to us. Do you still have hope and joy in him? Parents who hope in God alone will not live in despair over their children. But hope placed anywhere other than in the Lord will always disappoint.

Many of us do not realize how far our little tentacles of hope have stretched until they are tested. I remember when it became very clear that Zondra and I were placing our hope for peace and joy in things other than God, such as the following:

- our children’s salvation and blessedness
- our whole family’s increasing in godliness, togetherness, and joy
- godly children; a godly heritage
- a reputation as successful parents

It was easy for Zondra to place hope in a happy family, having had quite the opposite in her upbringing. I could easily place hope in continuing the type of family I had grown up with. Instead, we needed to set our hearts and hopes on God alone, knowing that he alone is deserving and sufficient (see Ps. 63:1–8).

Where we place our hope is where we find (or try to find) our ultimate joy. When we place our hope and joy in something other than the Lord, it becomes an idol of our hearts (see Ezek. 14:4–5;

1 John 5:21). We find ourselves regularly sinning or despairing over it.

No matter what is happening in your life right now, you can have joy in who Christ is, in what he has done for you, in the fact that he is your God always, and in the promise that you will be in heaven with him forever—*if* Christ is where your hope really lies.

Naturally, when our children reject Jesus or act foolishly to their detriment, we grieve. One of the deepest sorrows Zondra and I have is the lost condition of our beloved children (see Rom. 9:1–3). But according to the apostle Paul, it is possible, and even imperative, to have sorrow *and* joy at the same time: “As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities . . . *as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing*; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything” (2 Cor. 6:4, 10).

Even though there is a place for humble (not bitter) sorrow, we are to turn away from focusing on a child’s plight or our thwarted hopes and to think *more* about what we have in God—his undeserved grace and his faithfulness. Without these things, there can be no joy. Praise God, we can turn to the one who was himself a “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” *for us* and have joy in him (Isa. 53:3; see also v. 11; Phil. 3:10).

**Reflect:** Our real hope and joy must be in God alone—in who he is and in his promises to us.

**Act:** Ask yourself whether your children and their salvation mean more to you than Christ does. Confess, if need be, any misplaced hope or idolatry.

**Act:** Plan to think more about God, his undeserved grace, and his faithfulness. What can help you to do this?