

God's Care For a Single Mother

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 August 2023

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] Beginner worship singing in Psalm 116. Psalm 116, this is in the Scottish Psalter, that's on page 395. Over onto the next page. The tune is Bays of Harris.

I love the Lord because my voice and prayers he did hear. I, while I live, will call on him who bowed to me his ear. Of death the cords and sorrows did about me compass round. The pains of hell took hold on me.

I grief and trouble found. Upon the name of God the Lord, then did I call and say, Deliver thou my soul, O Lord, I do thee humbly pray.

Singing verses 1 to 8 of Psalm 116. I love the Lord. Let's stand to sing. I love the Lord because my voice and prayer cheated here.

I, while I live, will call on him who bowed to me his ear.

[1 : 27] Of death the cords and sorrows did about me compass round.

The pains of hell took hold on me. I keep my trouble found.

Upon the name of God the Lord, then did I call and say, Deliver thou my soul, O Lord, I do thee humbly pray.

O mercy full of righteousness, In graciousness our Lord, Of sins of me, I was the Lord.

O mercy full of righteousness, In graciousness our Lord, then did I help my Lord. O Lord, my soul, do thou return, O Lord, my soul, do thou return, Unto thy quiet rest.

[3 : 30] For thou art she loath, the Lord to thee, Isbam Jiham express.

For my distresses soared from death, Deliver what I be.

Thou bless my heart, Thou bless my heart, In high-dive eyes from tears, My feet from falling free.

Let's now engage in prayer. Let's join together as we pray to God. Lord our God, Lord our God, as we give thanks for our gathering together here in your name this evening.

We give thanks for the many ways in which these psalms that we sing, And so often speak of the way in which you have come to save people from the extremities of life.

[4 : 51] We thank you especially that you have come into this world to save us from our sins, And to deliver us from the various effects of sin in our lives, Which ultimately you will bring to completion in your salvation in heaven.

And we thank you Lord tonight that we have so much to give thanks for. And we thank you as we look into our lives, And realize the number of ways in which you bless us, Even the practical daily issues of life.

We give thanks, O Lord, for your remembrance of us, For the way that your eye is constantly toward us, And for the way in which we find through the word of the gospel, That invitation directed to us all, To come and to lay our burdens upon you, To come to you that we might find peace and help, And find rest for our souls.

Lord, we ask that you would bless us here this evening. We come before you as a confessing people, A people who confess, Lord, our sins anew in your presence, A people who seek your forgiveness, your cleansing, your acceptance of us.

A people, Lord, who come to give you thanks, Who come to express our thanksgiving, Not only in the words of our mouth, but in the manner of our life. And Lord, we pray that as we come before you, We may also come humbly.

[6 : 15] We may come realizing that we deserve none of those things by which you bless us, None of the very gifts that you give us in life. Lord, we confess that as we express our unworthiness, So, we pray that you would enable us day by day To increase in our sense of amazement, As well as thanksgiving, That the great and holy God should remember us in this way.

We come before you too tonight, Lord, as a congregation, And we join, we know, with so many others this evening, Not only locally, but throughout our nation, And indeed on this day throughout the world, Many people who come to worship you as we do.

And while we recognize, Lord, the many differences in the circumstances of people who worship you today, Nevertheless, we give thanks that your word teaches us that you have but one church, That you have but one people, one family.

And Lord, we give thanks that, as we know the blessings of belonging to that, So help us, we pray, to remember your people elsewhere in the world. Remember those especially who are tonight caught up in different circumstances to ours, Many more tragic and trying circumstances to ours.

And while, Lord, we do know that at times in your providence we find challenging and even painful circumstances, We know that as we hear of others throughout the world, That ours are very small and pale into almost insignificance, O Lord, compared to theirs.

[7 : 53] And we pray tonight that you bless your people wherever they are caught up in war, In different parts of the world, Where the devastation of war has reached into their lives, Where they are forced into fleeing not only their homes but sometimes their countries.

And we pray, Lord, wherever that is the case tonight, That your own blessing will be with your people. Remember them in Ukraine, remember them in Yemen, Remember them in every other place in the world where there is presently conflict and strife, And where the native hatred of human hearts is expressed towards their fellow human beings.

We ask, O Lord, that you would come to intervene in those situations, That you would bless your people especially, And that whatever, Lord, you guide them into, You would accompany them and you would be a means of comfort and assurance and strengthening to them.

And we ask your blessing, Lord, to be with all in situations of poverty, of distress, of famine, of floods, of natural disaster.

We find that so often, Lord, throughout the world. We pray for the people of this island of Hawaii that has been devastated by raging fires. Gracious Lord, we pray for the many who have lost loved ones as well as property.

[9 : 18] We ask that you would draw near to that community. We pray, Lord, that your Holy Spirit will bring blessing. And out of the devastation that you would enable them to rebuild their lives and rebuild their community.

We pray for all such, Lord, throughout the world who face difficulties of this kind. Situations that we can scarcely imagine. And we ask, Lord, that you would hear the prayers of those who are praying to you tonight, Along with ourselves, so that you would remember those people throughout the world.

We pray, too, Lord, for those who have challenges in the gospel. Challenges in reaching their own people. Challenges in taking the gospel to other parts of the world.

We pray that your blessing will be with all, O Lord, who have gone forth with the gospel to other lands, As well as in their own native communities. And we pray that your blessing will accompany the preaching of your word, The witness of your people, the declarations of your church as to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

That he is the way, the truth, and the life. That no one comes to the Father except through him. Lord, we pray for those who are with us this evening. We thank you for Pastor Alex.

[10 : 39] We thank you for his family. We pray for him here in his time here in the island. We pray for him in his ministry in Moldova. We ask that you would continue to bless him, to bless his family, to protect them, and to care for them.

We pray, Lord, for his flock, for all those who are ministered to by him. And we ask that your blessing will accompany the gospel there greatly and throughout that nation.

And we ask, Lord, tonight that you would bless those who mourn the passing of loved ones. Lord, we know that there are so many, even tonight in our communities, Who experience that such a loss as comes with death and with the removal of those who were loved from the scene of time.

Remember them, Lord, we pray. And when we gather, as we often do at funeral services and meet with families, Gracious Lord, help us, we pray, and help these families especially, To surmount the difficulties that attend such bereavements that come our way from time to time.

Lord, we ask that you would comfort their hearts, And that you would unite them together in that bond of trust and reliance upon yourself. We pray, too, Lord, for those who have health issues.

[12 : 00] Remember those tonight who have worries over themselves, anxious over loved ones, Those suffering from mental health issues, those suffering from various addictions. We commit them to you and ask for all who make an effort, Lord, To reach them and help them in their situation of need.

We pray for those involved in pregnancy crisis. We ask, O Lord, for all in our community who have these situations, And for all who seek to bring them help. Be with them, we pray.

Encourage them, Lord, in the work that they do. And we ask that you would be with us as a nation when we find so many things blighting our society, From the horrors of abortion through to the dangers that now are faced by those who face the possibilities of euthanasia.

Lord, so many things that are presently marks of our society in its fallenness and its sinfulness. And we pray that you would come and restore us, O Lord.

We pray that you would come and bring to us the power of the gospel, And that you would encourage us as your people to continue to pray to you. Now receive our thanks, we pray.

[13 : 18] Continue to bless us throughout the remainder of our service of worship. And accept us freely and pardon our sins. For Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to sing again to God's praise, singing this time in Psalm 15.

We'll sing the whole of Psalm 15 on page 16. The tune is Amazing Grace. Lord, who may stay within your tent, your sacred dwelling place, And who upon your holy hill may live before your face?

Whoever walks a blameless path, who acts in righteousness, And who will always from the heart sincerely truth express. That's Psalm 15.

The tune is Amazing Grace. Lord, who may stay within your tent. Lord, who may stay within your tent. Lord, who may stay within your tent, Your sacred dwelling place, Your sacred dwelling place, Undo upon your holy hill may live before your face.

Who ever walks a blameless path, Who acts in righteousness, And who will always from the heart, To cheerfully truth express.

[15 : 18] He has no sign from anyone, Nor does His name one more.

He has no sign within His heart, For standing of His child.

He honors those who give the Lord, The word bless Him despite.

He keeps the hope which He has borne, The word bless Him despite. He is the Lord, The word bless Him despite.

He has no sign, The word bless Him despite. He is the Lord. He is the Lord. If ■■■■■, I love you.

[17 : 10] O Christian, Savior. Let's turn now to read from God's Word.

And our reading tonight is in the book of Genesis. The book of Genesis, chapter 21. And we can read down as far as verse 21. So that's Genesis, chapter 21, reading verses 1 to 21.

The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him.

Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.

Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, God has made laughter for me. Everyone who hears will laugh over me.

[18 : 21] And she said, Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age. And the child grew and was weaned.

And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. So she said to Abraham, Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.

And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman.

Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you. For through Isaac shall your offspring be named. And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring.

So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and the skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away.

[19 : 31] And she departed and wandered into the wilderness of Beersheba. When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bow shot.

For she said, Let me not look on the death of the child. And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy.

And the angel of the Lord called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is.

Up! Lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation. Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water.

And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. And God was with the boy and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow.

[20 : 35] He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took him a wife from the land of Egypt. Amen. May God bless to us that reading of his word.

Before we look at part of this passage, let's sing again, this time in Psalm 103. That's in the Scottish Psalter, page 369.

And we're singing verses 6 to 13 to the Chulkilmarnock. God's righteous judgment executes for all oppressed ones. His way is to Moses.

He is acts made known to Israel's sons. The Lord our God is merciful and he is gracious, long-suffering and slow to wrath, in mercy plenteous.

He will not chide continually, nor keep his anger still. With us he dealt not as we sinned, nor did requite our ill. So that's Psalm 103, 6 to 13, God's righteous judgment executes.

[21 : 39] For all righteous judgment executes. For all oppressed ones. For all oppressed ones. His way is to Moses. For all oppressed ones. For all oppressed ones. For all oppressed ones.

His way is to Moses. And his way is to Moses. For all oppressed ones. And his way is to Moses. For all oppressed ones. He is like faithful to angels' sight.

The Lord, the Lord is merciful and He is gracious.

Of suffering and slow to wrath, in mercy ventia.

The King will not shine continually, nor be peace and mercy still.

[23 : 02] With us He dealt, not as we sinned, nor with me fight the will.

For us, the heaven in its height, the earth's our mountain fire.

So great to those that do in fear, its tender, their cheese are.

But God has ceased this distance from the west so far by the east.

From the tree who live in His love, all our inequity.

[24 : 19] God's pity has the Father come unto His children near.

Like when He chose the Lord to such a worship in Him.

Please turn with me to Genesis 21. And tonight we're going to look at the verses from verse 14, or really from verse 15.

Down through most of that section of the chapter. We can read from verse 14. So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder along with the child and sent her away.

And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. And when the water and the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off.

[25 : 35] About the distance of a bow shot. For she said, let me not look on the death of the child. And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept.

And God heard the voice of the boy. Well, we've called our study this evening, God's care for a single mother.

That's effectively what Hagar is in this account that we have of her in this incident. And all the other accounts we have of her as the mother of Ishmael.

Ishmael by this time was a teenager, 14, 15, 16 years of age or so. And we know that God's care for him at this instance is something that reminds us that God cares for those that we perhaps would not think he would take time over.

Here is a single mother. Here is a mother in the wilderness who doesn't belong herself natively to the covenant people of God. Here is a mother whose son is not going to be the heir of Abraham.

[26 : 52] Yet here we find God specifically looking towards this child and his mother in compassion, in mercy, in care.

And that really challenges ourselves tonight, even at that very level itself. We don't really need to go into the theology of such a passage as this to find that it challenges us towards our views in regard to our views, towards those in our society who are deprived, who have challenges like this woman as a single mother.

Challenges that we find in our society, challenges that we find facing us in our community, because there are many such people in our community. Circumstances that led to this involved both Abraham and Sarah.

And as you look right back to chapter 16, where the tension between Sarah and Hagar began, where Sarah had specified to Abraham that because she was childless, Now she said, Abraham said, Behold now, Sarah said to Abraham, Behold now the Lord has prevented me from having children.

Go into my servant. It may be that I shall obtain children by her. In other words, they were departing, even at that stage, from the intention and the purpose and the promise of God, and taking things, as it were, into their own hands.

[28 : 21] And that's always problematic for us. It always ends up with some trouble or other. And that's where the troubles of this household began. The tension, at least, between Sarah and Hagar began with that decision, and Abraham's own involvement in it as well.

So neither Abraham nor Sarah are free from fault by any means in the circumstances that lead up to this woman with her young son coming to be in the wilderness and deprivation and in danger.

And as you look at that, and as you find that this really brings before us the challenges of our age as well, we're reminded that we have to look around us as well and see that perhaps some of those that we might not think as immediately needy and immediately recipients of our compassion and of our love, people that we might say most of us might think of in some way or other as just somebody else's problem.

Well, here is a passage of the Bible that tells us those in whatever deprivation they are in around us are our problem. They are something, not in the sense of a problem, but a problem in the sense in which we can, as far as possible, give ourselves to alleviate their distress and help them with their distress.

There are all kinds of reasons why we find single mothers in our society. I'm not going to go into these reasons, but they're always there.

[29 : 57] Some of them are due to the tragic breakdown of marriage. Some of them are due to the death of a husband. Some of them are due to other reasons as well.

It's not really the reasons that we look at. It's the fact that that faces us. The fact that here is the gospel. Here is the Word of God. Here is God saying, I have something to say to you about that.

I have something to actually say in regard to unwanted pregnancies, for example. It's an issue that exists in our community.

It's something perhaps we think, well, that's somebody else's business. Others are dealing with that. There's not really anything for me to do in regard to it. So perhaps we tend to just push it aside or just not really think of it very deeply.

But those here tonight are involved in the likes of pregnancy crisis. And that, in fact, is one of the means by which an attempt is made to prevent abortions being carried out unnecessarily.

[31 : 02] And then, of course, afterwards you find that there's a need for a support mechanism. Not just for single mothers who have brought children into the world and who don't have a father with them to look after them, to help care for them.

There are also fathers like that whose wives have passed away, who are left with younger children to actually bring up. And that's a great issue, the great problem. That's something that we ourselves must take account of as well.

So wherever you find social problems, wherever you find this kind of situation, wherever you find single mothers for whatever reason, God is saying to us, take note of that.

And take note of it in such a way that asks yourself, what can I do? What can I contribute towards helping these people? And of course, the primary emphasis in the passage is on God's interest in this woman and her boy.

It is God who is before us. He is the main figure, not Hagar, not Ishmael, but God. She went into the wilderness. Abraham gave her this skin of water.

[32 : 15] And then after that had gone. After some time, she took her son. She supported him. You can imagine by this time, both of them would probably be very weak.

No water left, having wandered in the wilderness, in the heat and in the deprivation. And here they are, really exhausted. And she puts him under, guides him under, probably leaning on each other.

As you look at the imagery there, she placed him under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him, but not beside him. A long way off, a good way off, a bow shot, which is a fair distance.

And her words were, let me not look on the death of the child. And she sat opposite him and lifted up her voice and wept.

What a distressing situation for anyone to be in, especially for a mother to be in. A child that she had brought into the world, now on the verge of becoming a young man.

[33 : 23] And here he is, as far as she's concerned, in the process of dying. And probably herself to die with him. And then what happens? God actually comes into the situation.

He's never actually been out of it. But as she sat opposite him and there's, God heard the voice of the boy. Now that's itself very interesting, isn't it? Here is Hagar weeping.

Here is the child obviously weeping as well. And yet it's saying here, God heard the voice of the boy. The boy was related to Abraham. And being part of Abraham's wider circle of the family, God has a particular regard for this child because of his link to Abraham himself.

And in any case, whatever you might say the reason is, it's an amazing thing that God heard the voice of the boy. That God took note of that one individual young teenage boy in the wilderness of Beersheba.

Out of all the people in the world at that very moment, not that God wasn't aware of the others, but the focus in the passage is, God heard the voice of the boy. God was actually interested, concerned with this boy.

[34 : 40] God had a future for this boy. And there's another point that we need to bear in mind. Because very often when we find people in certain circumstances in this world that have fallen on hard times, we might say, well, poor so-and-so, there's not much hope for them.

What can they possibly contribute to society in a pathetic way? We must never, ever come to such conclusions about people. Because some of the greatest saints in history arose out of a deprived background or a background where they began a life of excess such as Augustine so many years ago.

Well, here is God coming to speak here to this woman. And the angel that God used, the angel called to Hagar and said to her, What troubles you, Hagar?

And there are two things that God revealed through the angel that Hagar needed to do. First of all, she needed to rouse herself. She needed to rouse herself.

Because what God said to her, fear not. For God has heard the voice of the boy. Up! Get up! He's saying lift the boy. Take hold of him.

[35 : 57] Go to him. Take hold of him. And you see, verse 17 there, you find him saying, What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not.

For God has heard the voice of the boy. And then he says, at the end of verse 18, Lift him up. I, for I will make him a great nation. See, there's such an emphasis there on what you might say the imperative that God is giving, the command, the instruction that God is giving, but it's accompanied with the instructive.

And you'll always find that throughout Scripture. When God gives us a command, even though that command, because it's from God, should itself be enough for us to comply with, and to give obedience to, God in his kindness so very frequently gives an added explanation.

What's the purpose of this command? Why am I commanding you this? What is the meaning of this command? What is attached to this command? And here he is coming to this woman and saying, Go and lift up your boy, for I will make him a great nation.

There is really a great incentive for her. Instead of as she thinks, this boy is just going to die, I don't want to see him die, and therefore I'm going to remove myself from a distance from him, so that I won't see such a traumatic thing happening.

[37 : 19] Here is God saying, No, he's not going to die. I have a great future for him. You see, God's command, as it's accompanied by his explanations, he really wants us to understand something of why he commands certain things from us.

He doesn't just give us a bare command and say, Do that. Or, Don't do that. He will always say, Here's why I'm commanding you to do this. Here is why I'm commanding you not to do that.

He tells us something of the importance of the actions attached to this, the promise attached to it, the purpose that God has in it. Isn't that a great kindness from God?

That he doesn't just throw out a command at you and say, Here is what I want you to do. Here is my command. Do this. No, he'll say, This is my command to you, but this is why I want you to comply.

This is why it will be good to you to comply. Good for you to comply. There is the kindness of God as he adds these explanations, these instructions to accompany his imperatives, his commands, so that together we will see the purpose of God and the way that God's interest in us as human beings is one that takes a very genuine interest in us.

[38 : 44] He wants what is best for us. He explains the commands to us because he says, I want what is best for you. My purpose is what is best for you, and therefore this is what it will lead to.

If you will obey me, keep my commands. And that's when he says to her, Up, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand.

Now, there's a lot of instruction in that itself, and sometimes the Bible, as you very well know, does give us words from God that are intended to rouse us into action, are intended to just give us a push, if you like.

Sometimes they're words that are very difficult, very challenging. Sometimes they're words that are really rebukes. Why does God do that? Well, because here is this woman.

She's no use to her son as she is. She's lying here weeping herself. She's withdrawn from her son, but she needs to take action, and the first action she needs to take is action about herself.

[39 : 50] She needs to get up. She needs to rouse. She needs to think. Instead of looking in upon herself, which is what you and I very often do as well, she actually needs to take a grip of herself and think about what God is saying about her son and to go to her son.

Isn't that how very typical we are ourselves at times? Instead of accepting things and just trying to move ahead and get on top of things, well, there's times when we just sometimes go into a bit of a slump, when we really just look in on ourselves and feel sorry for ourselves, and when we, even like others, as we'll see in a minute, begin to think even of God Himself somewhat critically and really are not prepared to face the situation.

I'm not saying from that that what you need to do with somebody who's really having difficulties, whether they're mental difficulties especially, you just don't go to that sort of person and come on, get a grip of yourself.

That's not the way to handle it, but here is God coming. Here is God coming to this woman, and what He's saying to us really is, come on, get up. Deal with this. Go and take a hold of your son, because I have a great future for Him.

And maybe tonight that's your problem and mine. Maybe we're thinking the problem lies with God. Maybe we're thinking the problem lies with society. Maybe it's the weight of the world around us.

[41 : 26] Maybe it's the difficulties of the journey that we're on. Maybe the difficulties really are ourselves. Maybe we've just come to slump into a measure of despondency.

Maybe we're expecting God to do something and it hasn't happened. And maybe we're just like this woman, feeling very sorry for ourselves.

Well, God is saying to us tonight, come on, get up. Think about what your life's about. Think about God's purpose for His people.

Think positively, not negatively about the issue. Up, He says to her. Go. And take hold of the boy. Lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand.

Now that happens to the best of us. And you'll find that in Scripture itself. Let me just pick up a couple of examples. Joshua chapter 7, for example, verse 10.

[42 : 26] You know the context there where the people of Israel were defeated as they tried to take the town of Ai. They were defeated because they had disobeyed God. And in the way in which the thing that God himself said was accursed, they had taken that which was banned by God.

And Achan had taken this wedge of precious metal and hidden it. And so God, in His displeasure, was directing His displeasure against the people.

They were defeated at Ai. And God actually dealt with it in a way that is interesting. Here is Joshua. Joshua, when this happened, he tore his clothes and he fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until the evening.

He and the elders of Israel, and they put dust on their heads. And you might think just reading that far, that here is Joshua really coming to positively face the issue and wrestling with God in prayer.

Yes, he's speaking to God, but what is he saying? He said, Oh, alas, O Lord God, why have you brought this people out of over the Jordan at all to give us into the hands of the Ammonites to destroy us?

[43 : 41] Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan. What is he saying? He's saying to the Lord, It had been better for us, Lord, had we never come to this place, had we never crossed the Jordan.

He really is saying to the Lord effectively, Lord, it would have been better for us if your promise had been in another direction. How does the Lord deal with him? The Lord said to Joshua, Get up.

Why have you fallen on your face? Israel has sinned. They have transgressed my covenant. They have taken some of the devoted things. They have stolen it and lied and put them among their own belongings.

What is he saying to Joshua? He's saying, Don't lie there despairingly. Don't lie there disconsoling. Don't lie there thinking that somehow or other, I have had some measure of blame and what I've done in leading you as a people in here.

Get up. Deal with this. Be positive about it. Deal with the situation as it is. Stop lying on the ground.

[44 : 49] You can't redo what's happened, but you can do something about it. And you remember Elijah the same way.

Similarly, at least in 1 Kings chapter 19, when he fled after the contest on Mount Carmel, and then there was a message sent to him that Jezebel was going to kill him.

And he ran, and he made his way into the wilderness. And what did he do? He lay under a tree there and complained to the Lord, Alas, Lord, it is enough.

Now, Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my father's. In other words, he's really saying to the Lord, My ministry is useless. Nothing's happening in response to what I'm saying to these people.

They're not turning to obey you, Lord. They're not turning to listen properly to what I have to say to them. They go on in the rebellion against me. What is the point of going on? What did the Lord do?

[45 : 49] Well, he came to him, an angel, and said, What are you doing here, Elijah? Twice he said that. Once before the angel came and brought him some food and so on, and once afterward.

But this is the question that God put to him. What are you doing here, Elijah? What's leaving you here? What's the meaning of you being here rather than where I put you to be a leader, to be a voice to these people of my will?

And so, what he said to him then was, Get up, go on your way. Back on your journey. Back to where you should be. And it's similar what he's saying here to Hagar, up, lift up the boy.

Go to him. Get up from where you are. Deal with the situation. And here we are tonight, whatever situation in life we're facing, and there are some much more difficult than other situations.

But what God is saying is, here is my word to you. Don't just brood over it. Don't keep it all inside. Don't look in on yourself.

[47 : 05] Get up. Be positive. Deal with it. Do what the Scripture says to you. Bring it to God. Pray over it.

Act as God would have you to act in regard to it. So there is, she needed to rouse herself. The second thing, the time is passing fast, and I need to move on to the second point, which is that she needed to give attention to her son.

Of course, we've mentioned that in the course of her study so far. But she says, Lift up the boy. Hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation. In other words, take hold of him.

Take hold of him and hold him fast is really the meaning of the words. Now imagine what that would have meant at that stage for Ishmael. Here he was. His mother had left him there. She went a distance from him.

He could hardly see her. Here he was, faced with the prospect of death and his mother is nowhere near him. Imagine now, here's his mother coming and taking him up and holding him and leading him on and supporting him.

[48 : 06] What a difference that would have made to his mind, to his mental state, would have made to him at that moment. And that's really something that is so important because you can actually take that in its spiritual dimensions as well and its moral dimensions.

We're in the world, friends, to actually be in a position wherever possible to take hold of other lives, to lift them up, to bring them support, to remember them in such a way that would do everything possible for them and especially to lead them to the Lord.

Lord. I mean, one of the greatest instances of that is in the parable of the prodigal son as we call it in Luke 15.

And there is the prodigal having returned home as he had come to realize his foolishness. He had come back to confess to his father that he'd done wrong.

And remember, the father there is really symbolical of Jesus, represents Jesus who receives sinners and eats with them. What did the father do? His father embraced him.

[49 : 15] He hugged him closely to his bosom. You imagine the difference if his father had just stood at the door and said, well, it's good that you're back, son, but go and wash yourself and then I might think about accepting you.

He took him as he was. He threw his arms around him. He fell on his neck and kissed him are the words of the Scripture there. And that must have been such an immensely important moment for that son.

Because there is the warmth, not just of a touch, but of a wonderful hug from the father. The touch that says, I am so pleased that you're back, genuinely delighted that you've come back home, my son.

And Rembrandt, the great painter, has a wonderful painting of the return of the prodigal as it's called. And you'll find it easily enough on Google. Have a look at it. It's a wonderful study of that passage in the form of a painting.

There is the prodigal on his knees before the father in his rags. His father has his hands around him, his hands on his back shoulder. And then there's a dark figure on the right of the painting, well-dressed, wringing his hands, looking with a sense of deep, deep abhorrence at what's happening in front of him.

[50 : 44] This is the elder brother. This is the one who didn't want the son really back at all in the family, who resented the fact that he'd come back after all that he had done.

And the painting represents just the dark, foreboding, and critical attitude of that elder brother.

What he's really saying is, how can my father ever receive such a person back again after all he's done? Well, it's representative, as we said, of Jesus.

This man receives sinners and eats with them. That's the difference between the Lord's mind, between God's attitude, and that of the critic, that of the person who says, no, that's just not right.

And here is God looking at this woman and her son and showing compassion and saying, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand.

[51 : 47] Do for him what God does for sinners. do for him what will assure him that all is well, for I will make him a great nation.

Friends, today we have great challenges facing us as far as our children are concerned, especially when we think of all the challenges facing them in the society of today.

We have to take hold of them in a spiritual sense, in a prayerful sense, and hold them up. That's what we're doing in terms of the work of the congregation and other congregations that have activities for young people, for children.

We've just had a holiday club with a marvelously encouraging attendance of some 80 children throughout the whole of that week. What is that doing to our hearts? It's doing this. We're holding these children up to the Lord.

We're saying, as we take hold of them in that sense, we're saying, Lord, please bless these children. Make them great in your kingdom. Make it to be that just like this boy, you will make them into a great nation.

[52 : 53] Take hold of them. Hold them up. And you know, one of the great things to have noted over the course of that week, not that it's anything new by any means, is the number of yourselves as adults, and some of you, even in the later stages of life, if you don't mind my saying so, like myself, who really took such an interest in that holiday club, in these children, in all the preparations and in the aftermath.

And I know you're following with your prayers. What are you doing? You're actually taking hold of these children. You're taking hold of them and placing them before the Lord, and you're seeking God's continued blessing for them.

Up, take hold of the boy. Lift him up. Hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him a great nation. And then what you see is that God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water.

And she went and filled the skin and gave the boy a drink. She needed to give attention to her son, but you see, as we said at the beginning, the great figure in the passage is God.

God showed her a well of water. He opened her eyes. She obviously wasn't aware of this well of water and it couldn't have been very far away.

[54 : 07] And there's a meaning in that for us as well, without stretching the point too far. But isn't it the case that when we slump into a sense of despondency and gloom and look in upon ourselves and really then, just as we said with this woman, just feel sorry for ourselves and look inwardly instead of looking positively, we don't actually see where the water is.

Our eyes are blinded to the source of our blessing. We lose sight of God himself to an extent. And we need to be redirected and we need to be shown by God himself.

Actually, you've traveled a bit from the well, but it's not that far from you. Here it is. Go and take a drink of it. It's for our refreshment, the well of God's truth, the well that God's salvation is for us.

And we always need to keep that in view, don't we? That was the problem with Peter when he stepped out onto the sea and began to walk towards Jesus.

And the first few steps, he was very successful. And then what happened? He heard the wind and he saw the waves and he looked around him and he began to panic.

[55 : 24] And as he began to panic, he took his eye off the Lord. And as he took his eye off the Lord, he began to sink. And so it is with ourselves. You take your eye off the Lord, inevitably you're going to sink.

You're not going to be actually going forwards in your life. Keep your eye on the Lord. Keep your eye on him as far as possible in all the circumstances of life, even in the difficult ways, in the challenging ways.

Don't take your eye off Jesus. Isn't that what Hebrews tells us? Well, let's run the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, looking unto him.

Because he's always ahead of us. I think that's such a marvelous emphasis. Again, going back to Elijah, where Elijah, and here is again God's command coming to him as he's there at the brook Kareth, being fed by the ravens, miraculously by God, God's care for him.

But then God comes and says to him one day, get out from here and go to Zarephath. For I have commanded a widow woman there to feed you, to look after you.

[56 : 37] You see, it doesn't matter what God is leading you to as a Christian from day to day, from moment to moment, from month to month, from year to year.

But you will always find that whatever is his purpose for you, he's always there before you. He's always going ahead to prepare the way for you. You will always find him, even if you're at the brook Kareth, and he's saying, I want you to go to such and such, you will always find him there ahead of you.

You will always find his preparation there before you reach it. What a great God we have. What a marvelous God to care for us in such a detailed way, in such a wonderful, compassionate way.

Well, she opened her eyes, God opened her eyes, and she saw this well, and she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

And the boy grew. He lived in the wilderness, and God was with him. And he lived in the wilderness of Paran. He became himself a great nation, the head of a great people.

[57 : 48] But it's all due to God. And here is God saying to us tonight, where are you in relation to my will, to my command?

Are you just hiding from it? Do you think it's too much for you? Do you think I don't have the resources to help you to face whatever it is I'm commanding you to do, however much of a challenge you may think it is?

Here is God saying to you, these circumstances you're in, yes, they're difficult. I know their difficulties, because I have ordained them for you. I have chosen them for you. Don't despair.

Fear not. Because for all of my people, I'm with them. I'm ahead of them. I'm behind them. I'm beneath them. And here is God saying to us too, that we need to give attention all the time to those who are in need, very often greater than ourselves, whether it's around us in our community, whether it's in our nation, whether it's overseas.

But God will always provide the resources for what He leads His people into. And as we take note of those who are deprived, and as we take note of our own need and seeking to help them, we have the great and glorious God on our side.

[59 : 12] And there is therefore no need to fear that somehow His resources will not be enough. Let's pray. Almighty God, we thank You for the resources that are Yours in abundance that You bring to Your people in all our circumstances.

We pray that You would help us, Lord, at all times to resort to the well that You are for Your people and to throw out water daily for the spiritual vitality of our lives.

We thank You for the constancy of Your care. We thank You for Your concern for those who are deprived, for those who may be outcast in our society or elsewhere. We give thanks for the love that You give to Your people to look towards those who are in need.

We pray that You would help us to follow out that urge to be of help to them. Graciously bless us now, we pray, and be with the fellowship and with Pastor Alec and his family as they address the fellowship.

Be with the young people and grant to them, Lord, that Your own presence and blessing might be evident to them. Hear us now, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to conclude our worship this evening singing in Psalm 139, 139, sing Psalm's version on page 181 and verses 15 to 18.

[60 : 37] It's such a precious Psalm in regard to the way in which God knows and cares for His people and how His knowledge of us extends even to our time before our birth.

And we come then to sing these verses thankful to God for that reality. when in the secret place my frame was made before my birth, You saw my body yet unformed within the depths of earth.

And all the days that I should live which You ordained for me were written in Your book, O Lord, before they came to be. So we'll sing verses 15 to 18 in conclusion.

with Scripture, about the foundation and ascended in if you would ■■■ champion of Big■■■
Ch■■X Total And all the days that I should have Which you are in for me Where written in
your beautiful dark

Before they came to thee O God, how precious I am, God I stand and walk above And as I
see you come and walk I have found, for let me die Where I took her that day would be O
God, the rain of sand

[63 : 30] When I am with you I am with you Till the sea Within you After the benediction I will go to
the main door Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God, the Father
And the communion of the Holy Spirit Be with you Now and evermore