

THE FIRST 15

Tuesday, July 23, 2024

Today is Tuesday, July 23 and we are studying what the Bible says about dark valleys.

OPENING PRAYER

I pause in the quiet stillness at the dawn of another day. There is rhythm to my life. The sun sets and rises, my heart beats within my chest, and my breath moves in and out of my body. Hours turn to days and days turn to weeks. In every season and circumstance, I am not alone. God is with me. I seek Him in the mountaintops and in the dark valleys. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." Exodus 3:7-10

REFLECTION

Moses was sent from the flaming fire of God. Standing barefoot on the holy ground of Mt. Horeb, God addressed Moses from the fire of a burning bush. God was ready to dispatch him to face a seemingly impossible future. In their brief conversation at the blazing shrub, the nature of God regarding human suffering was revealed. God is a God who saves. The adversity and affliction of the world does not go unnoticed by God. He is aware of it all. My challenges and difficulties do not go unnoticed by God. He is aware of it all. Whether I suffer myself or am a witness to the suffering of others, I can remember the way God handled his people in the story of the Exodus. My God sees and hears. My God comes and saves.

Just as God saw the misery of his people in Egypt, He keenly observes my struggles and pain. Other people may not be able to see what is hidden, but God does. God sees through closed doors and locked hearts. Not only does God see the suffering, He hears the sound of it. I may not be able to hear the grumbling stomach of a hungry child, but God does. I may not be able to hear the lonely cries of a widow's grief, but God does. I may not be able to hear the painful sobbing of a cancer patient, but God does. Other people may not be aware of the tears I weep alone at night, but God is. God is concerned about the suffering of humanity and through Jesus Christ has come down to provide rescue. God wants to bring me up out of the place of my suffering and take me to a good and spacious land flowing with milk and honey. My Good Shepherd wants to lead me through the dark valley to the blessings of the high ground. To green pastures and still waters. There is freedom from my distress and hope for my future.

As I consider the enslavement of the Hebrew people in Egypt, I ask myself what is the place of my enslavement. What is the source of my misery? The cause of pain or suffering. The name of my taskmaster. What has entrapped me and from what do I need to be rescued? God wants to speak to me about my current situation and answer my prayers. Perhaps God wants to reveal something that has me bound or imprisoned, preventing me from living the life God has for me. Maybe I am held captive by an idea, an attitude, a habit, or an old hurt. My jail cell could be physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, relational, financial, or professional. I consider all the places in my life where I am troubled or confined and cry out to God for relief.

Ask: What current personal suffering do I name before God? How can I become more aware of the suffering of others?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Loving God, sometimes I feel as if I suffer in silence and bear my pain alone. You remind me that You are with me, see my distress, and hear my cries. Thank You for Your concern for me in the dark valleys of my life. Come Good Shepherd, rescue me from my worries, release me from my troubles, extricate me from predicaments and set my feet on solid ground. Bring me up out of my sorrow. Unlatch the locked doors of my mind, break open the chains of my heart, kick down the fortress of my soul, unfasten the fetters of my sin and release me from the bonds of my captivity. Set me free for the life of blessing and peace You have for me. Amen.