

THE FIRST 15

Wednesday, July 24, 2024

Today is Wednesday, July 24 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

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 1 Peter 1:3-7

REFLECTION

In his letter to his church, Peter knows his people are going through some “dark valleys.” They are experiencing grief in all kinds of trials. Suffering, grief, and hardships are present because we live in a fallen world. Dark valleys are a present reality. Suffering is a part of the human condition and trials come into every Christian’s life. Sometimes Christianity is “sold” with the promise that being a Christian will lead to personal peace and prosperity. That nothing bad will ever happen to us. Peter insists such promises are false.

Who do you know who may be in a dark valley? The daughter who is losing her mother to Alzheimer’s. The mother who is losing her son to addiction. The man who continues to deeply grieve the loss of his spouse. The parents whose child tragically dies. The neighbor battling terminal cancer. The family member suffering chronic migraines. The caregiver tending a paraplegic spouse. The mother who is estranged from her child. The grandparents whose grandchild is convicted of a crime and imprisoned. The father whose daughter is bipolar and suicidal. The single parent raising a special needs adult child. The woman facing a long recovery following a serious accident. The young parents who are exhausted working multiple jobs and struggling to provide for their growing family. Who do you know who may be in a dark valley? This may be a family member. This may be your neighbor. This may be the person in your pew. This may be you. If not now, maybe sometime in your life.

Peter compares life’s trials to the process gold goes through for refining and purification (1 Peter 1:7). The analogy of gold refined in a fire would be familiar to Peter’s readers. Gold was

considered the most precious of metals. Fire burned off any impurities. In the same way, trials purify our faith producing a faith that is more precious than gold. A refiner's fire does not harm the gold, it purifies it, improving the quality and the value, leaving the metal better than it was before. When gold is fired, other things that "look like gold" are burned up or removed as waste. When it comes to faith, I don't know about you, but I want that noticeable difference. I want a 24 karat faith. A faith that has been refined in the fire. A faith that is pure, mature and complete. A faith that is genuine. A faith that is more precious than the finest gold.

Ask: How can I maintain hope and strengthen my faith in a dark valley? How can I offer faith and hope to someone who is struggling?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy and loving Shepherd, I look to You. I wait for You. I follow You through the valley of darkness, knowing You will expertly lead me through every difficulty, trial and circumstance. When I must go through a dark valley, a trial, a grief, or a suffering, I will keep my eye on You and draw close to Your side. I trust You completely. Be with me, comfort me, carry me, encourage me, strengthen me, refine me, lift my spirits, bring me joy, give me peace and offer me hope until the darkness has lifted and the light of life shines. Amen.