



MY REFUGE

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Music is a language, with many dialects, and singing is one of its expressions. Song has a wide variety of forms and flavors, but is universally enjoyed, even by those who think that they themselves cannot sing.

My brother is not a great singer, but he loves it so much, especially in groups, like at church, that he will join in courageously, without knowing the words or the tune—sometimes humming, sometimes catching the last syllable of a lyric, sometimes in tune, and sometimes providing a unique harmony. He just loves singing.

We sing when

- We're happy
- We're sad
- We're lonely
- We're mad
- We're together
- We're alone
- We're at work
- We're at home

I have sung since I was a young child. My brother recalls my visits to the bathroom, which sometimes lasted for 45 minutes, while I sat and sang at the top of my voice. Really, bathrooms and stairwells offer amazing acoustical support for singing.

But I really found my song when I met Jesus Christ. I had put up my guitar, and mostly just enjoyed listening to music and singing, and playing air guitar. But then I received the eternal life of Christ and something fresh began inside me. I experienced an emotional release. The feelings that had been dammed up within me were released. Almost suddenly, I had a song to sing! I picked up my guitar again and started singing, and I haven't stopped for the last 48 years.

While I used to be able to croon like Elvis, now I rattle more like Willie Nelson. Whatever. I love to sing! Especially to the Lord and about Him.

Psalms 59:16-17 NLT

But as for me, I will sing about Your power.

Each morning I will sing with joy about Your unfailing love.

For You have been my refuge, a place of safety when I am in distress.

O my Strength, to You I sing praises,

for You, O God, are my refuge,

the God who shows me unfailing love.”

Music is a language of the heart. It conveys emotion, not information. We can sit and listen to music and be transported emotionally to another “place.” Or, we can select the music that fits our current mood and just soak in it.

Familiar songs are often connected in our memory to a certain place or time or experience in our past when our emotions were deeply stirred in association with that song, or to which its lyrics refer. Hearing it again, even many years later, instantly rewinds our senses to that occasion. If that was a good experience, that song may get bumped up to our Top Ten list.

Today’s text is just one example of that from the Scriptures. Psalm 59 begins with this prologue:

For the choir director: A psalm of David, regarding the time Saul sent soldiers to watch David’s house in order to kill him.

Clearly, that was an emotionally tense event, remembered in lyric form because of the amazing deliverance that God gave David.

But take note of the last line of the prologue:

To be sung to the tune of “Do Not Destroy!”

Favorite tunes, that carried emotional weight, might, even then, be repurposed with new lyrics and given new life.

Many of the old hymns, written hundreds of years ago, and now considered by some to be stodgy and archaic, were, in their time, popular tunes that were repurposed with Gospel lyrics. 45 years ago, I visited a church in San Francisco that published a pamphlet of their own choruses for worship which they sang to familiar tunes from the 50s and 60s. The familiarity of the tune made them easier to learn and recall, while the new lyrics gave them fresh meaning and power. That’s what David did.

After six verses and a bridge, the last section is, I think, the chorus of this psalm, to be repeated at each of the interludes and sung again as a final crescendo. I have read it to you. Now, let me unpack its meaning for us today...

But as for me, I will sing about Your power.

The power of God is a stabilizing theme. It immediately reorients our thinking to the bigger picture of life.

There is a Creator. This world in which we live is not an accident.

There is an overarching purpose, even when we cannot see it.

God can help me. I am not alone.

This trial has an end. This, too, shall pass.

In the Bible, the word “power” may refer to authority and right, or it may refer to strength and ability. Sometimes the context makes it clear; other times, a word study is necessary to make the proper distinction. In this case, the context makes it plain.

Verse 17 addresses his song to God, his Strength. So that is the proper emphasis in this passage: the strength of God.

God’s strength or power is legendary—from speaking the material world that we know into existence, to governing its consistent order through what we observe as scientific laws, to overcoming enemy forces against overwhelming odds, to calming a storm with a word, to healing a body and raising the dead with a touch.

In this psalm, however, by the use of a parallel line in verse 16, David actually defined for us the power of God that moved him to sing:

Each morning I will sing with joy about Your unfailing love.

I will sing about Your power...

I will sing with joy about Your unfailing love.

Unfailing love is the power that God exhibited to David. When we think about the power of God, we should also think about His unfailing love. For it is greater and more enduring than the power of creation or the power to heal or the power to raise the dead.

First of all, it is universal in its application. God is love. And He loves in all situations and at all times.

Second, as this verse emphasizes, God’s love is powerful. It overcomes deeply entrenched issues. It surmounts great obstacles. It defeats overwhelming odds.

But underlying this word “unfailing” is the still greater concept of inexhaustibility. God’s love never runs out, never comes to an end.

*Your love never fails
It never gives up
It never runs out on me*

In fact, whenever it is applied it is not diminished; it actually increases. The more you give it away, the more you will have.

Let's remember Paul's words to the church in Rome:

Romans 8:35 Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean He no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? ³⁷ No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

³⁸ And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. ³⁹ No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

For You have been my refuge, a place of safety when I am in distress.

One of the wonderful ways God's love shows up in our lives is that He provides us with a "place of safety."

Proverbs 18:10 The name of the Lord is a strong fortress; the godly run to Him and are safe.

¹¹ The rich think of their wealth as a strong defense; they imagine it to be a high wall of safety.

We have witnessed in our lifetime the instability of riches. American stock market crashes have taken place in 1901, 1907, 1929, 1937, 1962, 1987, 1990, 2000, 2002, 2008, 2011, 2015, and, of course, 2020.

Add to these the scam artists who have bilked the public out of their hard-earned capital through Ponzi schemes, investment frauds, embezzlements, and identity thefts.

Proverbs 23:5 In the blink of an eye wealth disappears, for it will sprout wings and fly away like an eagle.

But the Lord is a refuge, a place of safety.

That's why I unashamedly urge every believer to discover the blessing of the tithe and develop an habit of generosity. It is an investment in your own well-being! My salary is fixed; I gain nothing by your tithe. But you stand to gain so much. You might consider it spiritual insurance.

According to Malachi 3:10-12, if you faithfully return the whole tithe to the Lord through His church, God will add blessing to your life that you haven't room to contain, and guard the work of your hands from the devourer, and make you a blessing to others.

If you're in financial distress, take refuge in the Lord!

If you're in emotional distress, hide yourself in the Lord.

Psalm 91:1 Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

² This I declare about the Lord: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; He is my God, and I trust Him. ³ For He will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease. ⁴ He will cover you with His feathers. He will shelter you with His wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection.

⁵ Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night, nor the arrow that flies in the day. ⁶ Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness, nor the disaster that strikes at midday.

⁷ Though a thousand fall at your side, though ten thousand are dying around you, these evils will not touch you.

⁸ Just open your eyes, and see how the wicked are punished.

⁹ If you make the Lord your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, ¹⁰ no evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your home. ¹¹ For He will order His angels to protect you wherever you go. ¹² They will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone. ¹³ You will trample upon lions and cobras; you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet!

¹⁴ The Lord says, "I will rescue those who love Me. I will protect those who trust in My name.

¹⁵ When they call on Me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them. ¹⁶ I will reward them with a long life and give them my salvation."

If you are in physical distress, call on the name of the Lord who heals all of our diseases.

Psalm 103:1 Let all that I am praise the Lord; with my whole heart, I will praise His holy name.

² Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things He does for me.

³ He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. ⁴ He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies. ⁵ He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle's! ⁶ The Lord gives righteousness and justice to all who are treated unfairly.

So David concludes this refrain with these words:

O my Strength, to You I sing praises, for You, O God, are my refuge, the God who shows me unfailing love.

Songs of praise are the fruit of the experience of God's love in our lives.

Christ's love for us is a shelter in which we may take refuge from life's storms. A covering, a place to hide, while we wait out the storm that swirls around, or within, us. When the winds die down—and they will, they always do—we can emerge to regroup or reform or renew our lives with His help, for He keeps on loving us—guiding us, providing for us, pruning us, promoting us—all for His glory and our good.

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Have you found your Refuge?

Have you found your song yet?

Then sing it!

With all your heart.

Each morning.

Whenever you possibly can.

To the God who shows you unfailing love.