

# *Week 4*

*The Blessing in Hardships*



*Seeking  
Serenity  
Devotional Book*



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# *Serenity prayer*

God, grant me the Serenity  
To accept the things I cannot change...  
Courage to change the things I can,  
And Wisdom to know the difference  
Living one day at a time,  
Enjoying one moment at a time,

*Accepting hardship as the pathway to peace.*

Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is,  
Not as I would have it.  
Trusting that He will make all things right  
if I surrender to His will.  
That I may be reasonably happy in this life,  
And supremely happy with Him forever in the next.  
Amen.

**Acknowledgement:**

**A Prayer for Serenity, Trevor Hudson, Struik Christian Media.**

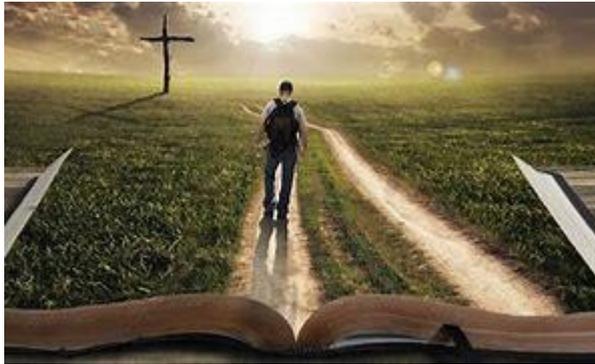
## **The Lord is my Shepherd Psalm 23**

<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. <sup>3</sup> He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.



**.....accepting hardship as the pathway to peace.**

MONDAY

## *Finding the blessings in hardships*



**Romans 8: 35-39** 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?

M Scott Peck wrote a bestseller about two decades ago entitled "*The road less travelled*". Trevor Hudson suspects that the reason for its popularity is the opening line which reads "**Life is difficult**". Most of us would agree with this. Life is difficult. Life can be painful. Life brings unexpected trials. None of us escapes pain, grief or loneliness. During the current pandemic, many have experienced loss of loved ones, retrenchments, financial concerns and loneliness being confined at home.

Sometimes those who appear to be flourishing are just better at hiding their pain. Deep down, everyone has some struggle and what counts is the way we respond to our difficulties.

Our words are important, they can either build us up or break us down. When we are unable to express our deepest fears and sorrows, they become like the elephant in the room, always there but not expressed. Amanda Enayati in her book "*Seeking Serenity*" speaks of our need to tell our stories, but

reminds the reader that some stories serve us better than others. What are the stories that you repeat to yourself over and over again? Does your story end with a thread of positivity running through as Paul's letters, or David's in the Psalms or is it one which increases your stress levels?

**When did you last pour out your heart to God? How did you feel when you had done that?**

God wants to hear us. He knows and cares about every aspect of our lives but He wants to hear us as He heard Paul during those difficult times. We are not alone, we have a God who cares deeply for us, who wants to guide and comfort us when we are facing hardships.



**PRAYER:** God, sometimes I feel overwhelmed by circumstances and in my panic I try to fix things myself. Help me to realise that I am not alone. Help me to cling to Your word and Your promise that You will never leave me nor forsake me. I place my trust in You today. AMEN

TUESDAY

## Avoidance behaviours



**James 1: 12** *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him.*

In his book “*The Serenity Prayer*”, Trevor Hudson identifies some behaviours by which we tend to avoid responsibility for some of our problems. He names a few –

**Blaming** – it is so easy to put the blame for our difficult situations on external factors. While we are not responsible for everything that happens, trying to distinguish that which we are to blame for is a deep life challenge.

**Denial** – ignoring problems does not make them disappear. Unless they are acknowledged, accepted and addressed they will remain a barrier to peace.

**Addiction** - We fill our lives with addictive behaviours which become more of a problem than the difficulty we are trying to avoid.

How can we step away from avoidance behaviours and move forward in facing our difficulties?

A few suggestions taken from Amanda Enayati’s “*Seeking Serenity*” :

- Seek self-awareness.

- Develop a better connection with God and with your community.
- Reframe your narrative of exclusion or not belonging to: “It’s not just me. I’m not alone. Others feel this way too. This will pass”.

**Do you have someone in whom you can confide when feeling overwhelmed by life’s difficulties? When did you last share your heart with someone you trust?**



Help to carry one another’s burdens.  
(Galatians 6:2)



Dear Jesus, please reveal to me any behaviour which stands in the way of my growth through difficulties I may face. Hold my hand and give me the courage to allow You to reveal them and then to walk in Your light. AMEN

WEDNESDAY

## *Good news – finding the pathway of acceptance*



**Psalm 23: 1-3** *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.*

Good news! Good news is something we all long to hear, and this is one bit of good news we need to hold onto. God is deeply present in all the facts of our lives. Good news indeed!

When pain and sorrow overwhelm us, when fear paralyses us, when it feels as though our world is falling apart, God is there. God is present. God is for us.

Suffering is the place where the suffering God draws near to us and we can experience His presence in moments of deep pain. If we constantly try to escape our pain, we can easily miss the gifts which God wants to bless us with. Serenity, peace and growth.

How do we get to the place of experiencing God's healing, calming and comforting presence?



A few pointers:

- Become present in the moment.
- Free yourself of expectations and preconceived ideas of how God will act.
- Be kind, to yourself and others who may also be suffering.
- Allow yourself time out from your difficulties so that you can refocus.

**Do you have somewhere to go in times of deep need – a place of quiet, a place of seclusion, a place of comfort? Can you name such a place?**

Just for today commit yourself to one of the above-mentioned activities. Just for today, take care of yourself and allow yourself to rest. Just for today.



Father God, help me to allow You to draw near to me. Help me to put aside all busyness and to sit at Your feet and wait. AMEN

THURSDAY

## *Keeping on moving towards acceptance*



**Psalm 23: 4** *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*

What does acceptance mean? Does it mean that we accept our hardships passively and become resigned to them? Does it mean we should throw up our hands and do nothing? Does it mean something different?

When we look at the cross, we see a picture of a God who is no stranger to human pain. God has been there. He has shared our pain. He who gave His life for us walked this earth and endured sorrow, frustration and pain on our behalf. We are never alone in our pain. God is with us and when we are still for long enough to experience His presence, we are able to take small steps towards acceptance. Each step is like a candle burning in the dark. It does not dispel all the darkness, but it guides us through, along the pathway of peace.

A quote by Nelson Mandela who knew hardship for much of his life reads as follows:

*"I am fundamentally an optimist. Whether that comes from nature or nurture, I cannot say. Part of being optimistic is keeping one's head pointed toward the sun, one's feet*

All change comes down to a series of small steps forward.

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*moving forward. There were many dark moments when my faith in humanity was sorely tested, but I would not and could not give myself up to despair. That way lays defeat and death."*

**Wonderfully inspiring words!  
Are we able to keep moving forward when times are dark and difficult?**

With God's help we are able! In God's strength we can take steps towards wholeness and serenity. In God's power we are able to overcome. Thanks be to God in whom we live and move and have our being.



Dear Jesus, I cannot imagine the pain You must have suffered when You walked this earth. Keep me mindful of Your presence each moment of this day. Teach me to rest in You, to trust in Your power and love and to walk in serenity with You. AMEN

FRIDAY

## *Committed to seeing the blessings*



**Psalm 23: 5 & 6** *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

So how do we keep going forward during difficult times? Yes, there will be days when you will question, when things seem so difficult that you would rather just give up and sit down. There will be times when you will question what you did to land in such difficulty. Take heart, when these days loom - and they will - you will need a strategy to help you through. The road of "if only I had ..." is not helpful and negative accusations do not help a sense of self-worth. A good brisk walk may clear your mind of negativity, a cup of tea or spending time in the garden may also be useful.

Is there a trusted friend you can call - someone who will listen and not judge, who may provide some perspective for you?

Another way of moving forward is to reach out to somebody else. Do a kind deed, tidy away clutter and give away of your excess! Small and insignificant activities such as

this can help as you think of others and not yourself.

Hold onto the words of Psalm 23 "surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

If God is for us, who can be against us? You are a child of the living God who sacrificed His only son Jesus that you may live. Live in this knowledge!

**Life is like riding a bicycle.**  
**To keep your balance, you must keep moving.**



**What difference would it make to you if you knew that God was deeply present in all the facts of your life?**



Father God, teach me to trust You in every aspect of life. Hold me close when I feel I am losing my way. Help me to live in resurrection power and to hold on to Your hand as I live into new hope. AMEN