

February 2024

Dear Friends,

As this is my first letter for the year, let me begin with a HUGE thank you for your generous support in 2023! We finished out our year in a great place, thanks to you! I didn't want to just head into this letter without first acknowledging our deep, deep gratitude.

And cheers to all of you who joined us for another pass through 30 Days to Resilient in the Pause App last month! It had been some time since I'd done the program myself, and it was a lifesaver! If you haven't been in the app for awhile, and especially 30 Days, jump in again! You won't be disappointed—I promise!

Okay. Turning the corner now. I've been thinking a lot about refuge.

Across the British Isles, particularly on Scotland and Ireland's rugged coastlines, stand the remains of ancient stone towers, some of them thousands of years old. They fascinate me. Most are on the wild and windswept coastlines; many are found on the remote smaller islands. People living in those exposed places built these fortresses of protection against sea-born raiders, slave traders, and invaders. Later came the famous round towers of Ireland that dot the countryside wherever a monastic village once flourished. In the Americas, there are the Anasazi cliff dwellings built halfway up enormous rock faces in such a manner that when the ladder was pulled up, there was no way to access the community from above or below.

Refuge. The human need for refuge.

It is ancient, primal, and it helps us envision what the Psalms mean when they promise that God will be our refuge:

But let all who take refuge in you be glad;
let them ever sing for joy.
Spread your protection over them,
that those who love your name may rejoice in you. (Psalm 5:11 NIV)

The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge...my stronghold. (Psalm 18:2 NIV)

Hear my cry, O God;
listen to my prayer.
From the ends of the earth I call to you,
I call as my heart grows faint;
lead me to the rock that is higher than I.
For you have been my refuge,
a strong tower against the foe. (Psalm 61:1-3 NIV)

And of course the famous Psalm 91:

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."
Surely he will save you... (91:1-3 NIV)

And then the Psalm goes on to talk about all the ways God will save you if you take refuge in him. And, friends, that “if” is very important. Taking refuge in God is a choice, a practice, and a cry of the heart. I think we need to learn the reality of this for ourselves.

The developed world with all its comforts, armies, resources, and technologies has lulled us into thinking that our safety is found in where we live, in various public services, in our savings. And yet, I think many people are now feeling the intensity of the hour and the need for a true place of emotional, mental, and spiritual refuge.

So allow me to say this as clearly as I can: Jesus Christ is the only safe place in the world. In him, that is. In Christ is the refuge we seek. There is no other. If you read through the “refuge” Psalms, they speak over and over of the act of “running” to him.

The presence of God—Father, Son, Holy Spirit—and the vast resources of his Kingdom are always nearby. But we do need to make conscious choices to take our refuge in God and his Kingdom. Otherwise, we are taking refuge somewhere else.

(You might want to give some thought to where you do look for safety these days—for a sense of well-being, centeredness, groundedness, and spiritual protection.)

Here is how we begin to practice God as our refuge and fortress:

1. First, we proclaim it. We *declare* it, as in Psalm 91: “I will say of the Lord, ‘You are my refuge...’” That “saying it” part is very important. You are aligning with reality; your soul and spirit will follow.
2. We practice the turning of the heart, for this is how we run to him. Say it out loud as your heart turns to God. “I run to you, Lord. I hide myself in you.”
3. We surrender all other self-protective strategies, like isolation or the need to be in control. We repent of looking to the world for refuge.
4. We ask God to surround us as our shield: “Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”

Friends, we live in times just as dangerous as our ancient forebears. Let us not be lulled into a false security by the comforts around us. We must, we *must* practice God as our refuge. Here’s what I would add: a) Read through the Psalms looking for the words *refuge*, *shelter*, and *fortress*. Linger there. b) Practice a simple prayer every morning, like this:

Lord, I run to you this morning. You are my refuge, my fortress, and I take refuge in you. I bring everything I am into you, Lord Jesus. Surround me with your protection; hide me deep in you.

I think you will begin to see how important this is, and how wonderful.

Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'John' written in a cursive, flowing style.

John