

GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU

The title of this essay is also the title of a hymn that I have sung since childhood. The chorus is quite insistent:

God will take care of you, through ev'ry day, o'er all the way.
He will take care of you; God will take care of you.

When some people sing or hear the words "God will take care of you," they interpret them to mean "God will not let anything bad happen to his children." In this essay I will discuss my three reactions to this view: (1) the Scriptures certainly do not promote that interpretation; (2) the hymn writer had another idea in mind; and (3) I personally have a far different interpretation, which partly comes from my childhood memories. I will write about each of these points in turn, then conclude with reflections on Psalm 23 and Romans 8:28.

(1) First let's look at some Bible passages that clearly state that difficulties, diseases, dangers and all sorts of "bad things" are a normal part of the lives of believers as well as of others. We will also notice God's place – and ours – in all of this. A foundational truth for us to learn as early as possible is Hebrews 13:5b,6: *God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can people do to me?"* I am overwhelmed with gratitude as I ponder these words! Times when we need help, fearful times, WILL come to us. God's part is to BE WITH us, ready to help. Our job is to BELIEVE God's promise that he will never leave or forsake us. That shouldn't be hard; God certainly wouldn't lie, right?

Here is something else that the Lord says: *"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze"* (Isaiah 43:1,2). I like the word THROUGH in this passage, for after the BELIEVING mentioned above, comes an incident by incident EXPERIENCING of the presence of God. What a wonderful relationship develops as we go through life's ups and downs TOGETHER with our Lord!

I think the waters, rivers and fire mentioned by Isaiah represent hardships of any kind that come into our lives, rather than literal floods and flames, although it could also be the latter. This passage is one of the many that I set to music during a 25-year period starting in 1977. About ten years later, I was driving alone on unfamiliar roads through the state of Maryland when a gentle rain turned into a downpour. Thinking I would be safer there, I got off the highway as soon as I could and began traveling on a parallel route that went through small towns on its way south. What I didn't know ahead of time was that the local streets were flooded, as though a creek had overflowed its banks due to the heavy rain! While I was pondering what to do, a tune began running through my head. I knew it was one of my Scripture songs, but which one? When I realized that it was Isaiah 43:1,2 I laughed aloud so heartily, and all my fears fell away. Isn't that just like our Lord? I was not alone after all! I was confronting LITERAL waters and there was God, bringing me THROUGH!

Here are some other verses pertinent to our topic: Jesus said, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28); and Peter adds, *"Cast all your anxiety upon him, for he cares for you"* (1 Peter 5:7). Any time we are weary, burdened and anxious, there is God, ready to help – if we want him to! Jesus invites us to COME to him, to CAST our burdens on him, because he CARES for us. Among other things, surely this means that God LOVES us. God IS love, the Scriptures say. We are loved with an EVERLASTING love. We can step outside of God's will, but not outside of his love! Another meaning might be that God TAKES CARE of us, which brings me to my second point:

(2) What did the hymn writer have in mind when penning the words to “God Will Take Care Of You”? Civilla D. Martin, the writer, lets us know the answer in the first verse of her hymn:

Be not dismayed whate’er betide, God will take care of you;
Beneath his wings of love abide, God will take care of you.

Far from thinking that a loving God won’t let anything bad happen to his children, she says, “Don’t be shocked, no matter WHAT happens in your life. Stay close to God; he loves you and will take care of you.” As I sit here in my wheelchair, having just had an aspiration/choking episode as I was pondering these words, I can truly say that I am not shocked by my condition. Whether I live or whether I die, God will take care of me!

Civilla Martin goes on to say:

Through days of toil when your heart doth fail, When dangers fierce your path assail,
God will take care of you.
All you may need he will provide, Nothing you ask will be denied,
God will take care of you.
No matter what may be the test, Lean, weary one, upon his breast,
God will take care of you.

She writes of the God of all comfort, our nurturing, nourishing God who never runs out of what we need, including grace and mercy. But how did we get into such a needy condition? The answer lies in the stories of Adam and Eve declaring their independence from God by disobeying him and the one of Cain killing his brother Abel (Genesis 3,4). All the problems we face in life stem from the consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin, which passed down to their posterity, including us. Couldn’t God have prevented the first couple from sinning and Cain from murdering Abel? CERTAINLY, but not without violating their free will, their humanity. How, then, did God take care of them? By confronting them and giving them a way to be right with him again. Adam and Eve accepted God’s offer, but Cain did not.

As for Abel, who already was right with God, Hebrews 11 tells us that not only is Abel still living, but he’s still speaking! I believe this is through our pondering his written story. Do you hear him speaking? God did! Genesis 3:10 says: *The Lord said (to Cain), “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.”* Besides addressing the huge topics of God’s justice and vengeance, as well as assuring us that with God there are no unsolved crimes, this is part of what I hear Abel say: “Have faith in God and live, as best you can, in harmony with him. You never know when you will die; death may come from an unexpected source! God was there with me when Cain was killing me, and he carried me – ALIVE – to a place that is so incredible in every way that I can’t BEGIN to describe it to you. Whether you live on earth a short time or long, please know that the earth is just a place of preparation. The best is yet to come! Don’t be afraid! God will take care of you!”

And that brings me to my third point, the way I think of the hymn title because of my experience:

(3) I was certainly born to loving parents. Though they did not speak the words “I love you,”* they showed their love by the way they took care of me. Stunning pictures are flooding my mind right now as I think of Mom and Dad’s tender, loving care, especially when I was sick. My first critical illness was when I was 2-1/2 years old; my only memories are from what Mom told me later. The culprit was pneumonia in 1935, before the common medicines we use now were invented. One night our doctor’s nurse stayed with us, for those hours would be the turning point: would I live or die? I can only imagine what trauma my parents went through that night! Obviously, I survived, but I was left with chronic bronchitis and chronic sinusitis, the basis for many of the illnesses I had in childhood and throughout my life.

Early on I learned of my near-death experience with pneumonia, but only about 10 years ago I learned that children often died of croup in those days. I'm sure my parents knew that! I would be estimating conservatively if I said I had croup at least 10 times in childhood. In my first year of school I was absent due to sickness as many days as I was present! My parents did not complain about the extra work I caused them, nor about the expense I was to them. Instead, this is some of what I remember:

- Mom cooking onions to make a poultice for my chest.
- Endless applications of Vicks Vaporub to my chest and beneath my nose.
- Many trips to the doctor, plus visits from the doctor at home.
- The oranges my parents brought me, each with a hole cut into the stem end so I could squeeze the juice right into my mouth.
- Nighttime vigils at my bedside, with Dad holding a white, enamel basin for me.
- Breakfasts in bed. Toast and cocoa.**
- Mom putting our only portable radio on a chair next to my bed so I could hear “The Breakfast Club” at 9:00 in the morning and “My True Story” at 10.

NEVER did I accuse my parents of CAUSING my illnesses, nor of having anything but my good in mind as they took care of me. If I had, it would have made me question both their love and their attempts to comfort me, and I certainly would not have been a grateful daughter! So it is with the Lord. I cannot understand believers who blame God when hardships come their way. This puts a barrier between themselves and the care God wants to give them. Feeling the separation, they may become even angrier and think themselves abandoned by God. How sad! How much better to run into God's open arms when troubles come, and receive an eternal hug while we cry on his shoulder!

I am ABSOLUTELY CONVINCED that God is GOOD, that God LOVES me and is ALWAYS PRESENT to take care of me, no matter what my current need. Jesus is my #1 friend, so I am never lonely, and here at Sky View Nursing Home, he is my #1 caregiver! My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*** Join me, will you?

* * * * *

Two additional Bible passages came to mind while I was writing the above, proving once again that the Scriptures just CANNOT be exhausted! Both are so familiar, which makes them accessible for meditation: Psalm 23 and Romans 8:28. With these thoughts and some footnotes, I will close this essay. To God be the glory!

PSALM 23

This Psalm can be – and has been! – looked at from so many vantage points. This time I noticed that David could have subtitled his psalm “God will take care of you.” He used a powerful method to convey his message: his personal testimony. I am SURE he was thinking of the kinds of things he did for his sheep as he wrote about the way the Lord took care of him. I wonder if he was also thinking about how his mother tended him when he was a child? You will see as you read my comments that I have my mom in mind along with the early years of my five children, as I see myself under God's care, for like David I can truly say:

The Lord is MY shepherd; I shall not want. In my childhood home, occasionally my parents would hug each other while standing over the grating that covered our coal furnace (the warmest spot in our house). My brother Harold and I looked on with pleasure; not so our toddler brother, Bobby. He

would squeeze between Mom and Dad, wrap his arms around Mom's legs and say, "She's MY mommy!" In families, as with God, we learn that love is not diminished when it's shared!

He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul. I am a great believer in the restorative power of sleep and rest. My mom would send me to bed at the first sign of illness. Often a good nap was just what I needed. If my brother and I were misbehaving, Mom would tell us to go sit in a chair until we calmed down. When my own children would become irritable, I would say, "Obviously, you are tired. Lie down on your beds for half an hour." Often they fell asleep and awoke refreshed. My shepherd knows when and where to make ME lie down, too!

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, 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. To me, this whole section speaks of protection, and the comfort and confidence you have when you trust your protector. My mother was terribly afraid of thunderstorms, since one of her uncles had been killed by lightning that entered a house. When a storm came during the night, she would wake up the rest of us, including Dad, and make us go sit on the sofa, away from windows and electrical outlets, until the storm ended. None of us would be harmed if Mom could help it!

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. My mother devoted a large portion of her life to preparing food for her family, much of which had been grown in my father's garden. She was doing her duty, as she understood it, and how we appreciated her efforts! Called to dinner in various ways, the children in our neighborhood scattered from being with each other in the evenings to being with our families. I carried on the tradition of family meals with my husband and children. That's one way to counteract the "enemies" that would like to tear us apart.

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. My mom also believed in using oils in taking care of me. She had a small bottle of camphorated oil that she would pour out and warm before rubbing it onto my chest and back. She had a larger bottle of cod liver oil which she fed to me in daily doses. And I used many bottles of baby oil to keep the bodies of my babies in good condition. Using oil on another is a "hands on" activity. I can well imagine that it's the cup of JOY that overflows with the relaxation and comfort that comes from massage!

SURELY goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Now that I am in the last part of my life on earth, I can look backward and say that goodness and mercy HAVE followed me every step of the way. I can look forward and say that I WILL dwell in the house of the Lord forever. God WILL take care of me – and YOU! Amen.

ROMANS 8:28

And we know that in ALL THINGS God works for the GOOD of those who love him, who are the called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28, emphasis mine).

New thought: Have you ever made homemade bread? After the ingredients are assembled, they must be kneaded together until they form a well-blended dough, which is then allowed to rise. The next step is to knead the dough again, and perhaps a third time, until finally it is ready to be formed into a loaf and baked. Then it is ready to be eaten, the purpose for which the process was begun.

Sometimes "kneading" the dough is aptly called "working" the dough, for it does require effort as well as skill to prepare the dough properly. In Romans 8:28 I can picture God as the Master Baker, working (that is, kneading) together all the ingredients that come into our lives, adding some of his own for balance, getting his children ready to fit into his good purpose for them. Part of that purpose is that we might be nourishing bread for others, reflecting our Lord, who becomes the Bread of Life to all who will come to him and eat.

Once I bought a loaf of pumpnickel sauerkraut bread, anxious to see how it would taste. Being raised in the Pennsylvania Dutch culture, sauerkraut was a staple in our home, and I liked it, but I could not imagine tangy, salty, stringy sauerkraut as an ingredient in bread! As I savored my first bite, I realized how wrong I was to doubt the wisdom of the baker. The sauerkraut flavor was very subtle, not overpowering as I had suspected. No sauerkraut was visible; the fine grain showed how well the ingredients had been blended. In addition, I found the bread to be delightfully moist, a good quality I attributed to the sauerkraut.

Now back to the analogy of God as the Master Baker. I can see our lives being assembled in individual bowls. Besides the usual ingredients, each bowl contains some “sauerkraut” – sour, tough times. Mine includes some sauerkraut labeled primary lateral sclerosis; yours has different labels. Every time more sauerkraut is added to our bowls, God adds more of his own special ingredients, such as GRACE, MERCY, and LOVE – lots and lots of LOVE! As he kneads the dough until the consistency is just right, we may find that we no longer consider our “sauerkraut” to be “bad,” since it produces such good results!

And so, if you are one who loves God, don't worry. No matter WHAT comes into your life, whether sweet or sour, you can count on this: God WILL take care of you. Amen.

Footnotes:

* Parental hugs and kisses were also absent from my childhood, though it didn't matter to me. During my first year in college, things changed. I noticed a classmate kissing her father goodbye, and thought, “What a good idea!” From then on I hugged and kissed my mom and dad both hello and goodbye, and they responded very well! When our oldest son, George, reached talking age, he looked up at my mom and said, “I love you, Grandma.” Mom was completely puzzled! “He wants you to say, ‘I love you, too,’ ” I told her, and she did! Those words became standard for my parents from that day on.

** When my daughter Marty read this part, she said she remembers my setting up a folding tray alongside her bed and serving her chicken noodle soup, crackers and JELL-O when she was sick.

*** Mary's words from Luke 1:46. I borrowed them, as they expressed what I wanted to say.